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Spaces of virtual consumption the case of internet shopping

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SPACES OF VIRTUAL CONSUMPTION: THE CASE OF INTERNET SHOPPING

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Abstract

The Internet plays a central role in the lives of an increasing number of people, whether as a space for entertainment, information, learning, socialising or shopping. With access and penetration of high speed connections ever increasing, the so-called “Internet revolution” is set to continue. This study primarily focuses on the ways in which the Internet is used for shopping, commonly known as e-tailing.

Academics have long studied a number of issues that are of significant importance to the phenomenon of e-tailing. The popularity and growth of the Internet has led to a large number of studies that focus on cyberspace, ranging from issues of users’ identity, interaction and communication to the behaviour of web users and through to the construction / deconstruction of place online. Much has been written on the subject of consumption, its birth and growth through different “consumer revolutions” to the present day globalised world of mass consumption. Linked to consumption is retailing, which is also widely covered in academic literature, including traditional spaces and forms of retailing, as well as “alternative” spaces such as farmers’ markets and car boot sales. Whilst much has been written on these individual themes a significant gap in the literature is apparent. This study combines these three topics to critically explore the geography of online retailing and its influence on consumers’ shopping behaviours and cultures of consumption and the relationship between ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ spaces. In particular, emphasis is placed upon the consumer. This is achieved through a number of methods, including a 100 user baseline survey and a more in-depth four Internet user biography stage.

The findings suggest that a number of factors influence the behaviours of online shoppers, including the layout of websites, the content and familiarity that consumers have with sites, and the trust and loyalty users have with particular retailers. This allowed for the formation of five distinctive Internet shopping typologies: functional Internet shopping; bargain Internet shopping; lifestyle Internet shopping; specialised Internet shopping; and discreet Internet shopping. Whilst these shopping types are distinctive it is shown that consumers tend to exhibit more than one type of shopping behaviour. Once seen as an “alternative” space for shopping, the Internet now displays the same forms of mass consumerism as the “real” world and acts as a mirror/extension of the High Street.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 – The Rise of the Internet

Cyber geography is defined by www.cybergeography.org as 'the study of the spatial nature of computer communications networks, particularly the Internet, the World-Wide Web and other electronic places that exist behind our computer screens, popularly referred to as cyberspace'. The term Internet covers a broad range of functions, including: a) the World-Wide Web (millions of web pages and web sites); b) email; c) usenet (public newsgroups); d) Internet mailing lists; e) Internet chat rooms; and f) other specialised tools such as telnet (Valongo; 2001). The Internet was originally developed by the US military during the Cold War to assist communications in the event of a nuclear attack. This development continued, in partnership with US universities, throughout the 1970s and 1980s. During the late 1980s the general public first gained access to the Internet. Its form at that time was very different, mainly consisting of email and usenet. The modern face of the Internet really began to take shape in May 1990 when physicist Tim Berners-Lee, working for the nuclear physics research institute CERN, invented the 'World-Wide Web'. It took a further three years before the University of Illinois released MOSAIC, the first web browser that was available for people to use on PCs and Apple Macintoshes (info.cern.ch).

From here, access to the Internet has grown rapidly across the globe. Miniwatts Marketing Group (www.internetworldstats.com) states that at the end of 2007 there were more than 1.3 billion Internet users worldwide, a growth of 265.6% since the year 2000. As well as a huge growth in usage across the globe, the ways to access the Internet have also changed and developed. The Internet is now available wirelessly, through mobile phones and in almost any location around the globe through mobile broadband. The Internet is also used in very different way. We are currently in the middle of a new era for the World-Wide Web, termed Web 2.0. The main advancement here is that Web 2.0 users can interact with the Internet and each other much more easily using, for example, blogs, social networking sites, and wikis. These sites promote creativity, teamwork and sharing amongst users and provide a greater involved experience for users. These technologies all have their own,

evolving human geography. People in different places are now 'connected' together and readily share ideas across a range of issues.

In line with the growth of Internet use and types of use, shopping online has also increased rapidly. Retail consultants Colliers CRE state that by 2007 sales of goods online in the UK had grown to £14.7 billion from approximately £1 billion in 1996. They forecast that online sales could rise to over £35 billion by 2015. This highlights the continued importance and popularity of online shopping and this subject will provide the main focus for this research. The overall aim and objectives for the project are set out in the following section.

1.2 – Aim and Objectives

A broad aim and a number of more specific objectives have been developed for this study. The overall aim of the project is: *“to critically explore the nature of UK online retailing, especially its influence on consumer shopping behaviours and the link between ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ space”*. Connected to this are three specific objectives, as set out below:

- To explore how people become involved with the Internet and technology for shopping, and to assess the extent to which this is part of people's everyday lives.
- To appreciate the different aspects of Internet shopping behaviour displayed by individuals, and to understand the mechanisms that cause individuals to buy certain products from certain electronic retailers.
- To investigate the relationship between 'real' and 'virtual' shopping spaces.

The above aim and objectives have been designed to allow this study to make a distinct contribution to the academic literature on online retailing. This is an area of work that to date has attracted fairly limited attention within human geography (but see Bingham; 1999, Holloway; 2002, Holloway and Valentine; 2001, Murphy; 2007), especially in relation to the ways that consumers perceive and use the Internet as a mechanism to buy goods. More broadly, the thesis relates to a wider and long standing set of debates within human geography and the wider social sciences concerned with consumer behaviours, the culture economy and innovations in retail

and marketing (Slater; 2002). This “gap” in knowledge and interest in consumer behaviours is also highlighted by the recently completed Cultures of Consumption research programme, which included a total of 26 research projects in the social sciences, arts and humanities that examined various issues, including the rise of alternative food networks, the sociology of chewing gum, food commodity chains, ethical consumerism, water consumption, nineteenth century horticulture and the Internet and modern consumer society (for further details, including copies of working papers, see: www.consume.bbk.ac.uk).

By looking at three specific themes – cyberspace, consumption and retailing, this project provides a unique look at online shopping from a cultural geography perspective and seeks to build on some of the work of the Cultures of Consumption programme. The need for research of this type is justified more fully in the review of the literature in Chapter 2.

1.3 – The Study Area

In geographical terms, this study is concerned primarily with cyberspace. Cyberspace, the virtual space created by networks such as the Internet, where individuals can interact with other people and experiences 24 hours a day, has become a key space in modern life. In this thesis cyberspace denotes the Internet, even though it in fact constitutes other phenomena (see Chapter 2 for further details). This research thus explores how Internet users and shoppers in particular, experience, navigate, interact and make use of this space as part of their consumption habits. In other words, the geographical emphasis is on the space of cyberspace set within the context of consumption.

Cyberspace also provides an excellent opportunity to examine the dualism between the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’. So, while the main study area for this project is undoubtedly cyberspace, it also has roots in the “real” world. All of the baseline survey work was therefore carried out in Coventry and the majority of the Internet users involved in the biographies were from the Coventry area – apart from one which took place in London (see Chapter 3 for details). Coventry is the ninth largest city in England, situated in the West Midlands metropolitan area, with a population of 303,475 (Census 2001). Statistical data from 2005 places the West Midlands as the fourth highest region in England for households that have Internet access, with 56% having access, just 1% above the national average (www.statistics.gov.uk).

1.4 – Structure of the Thesis

The thesis has six chapters, starting with this brief introduction. The rest of the thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the existing academic literature relating to the three main subject areas of the thesis – cyberspace, consumption and retailing. The process of review leads to the creation of a broad conceptual framework for the study. Chapter 2 suggests the need to explore more fully consumers' shopping behaviours and how they are developed online.

Chapter 3 begins by looking at a small number of previous studies related to the Internet and where possible consumer behaviours. This examination of previous work allows for the identification of a number of common methods and techniques that researchers have used and helps to inform the methodology employed here. This consisted of two distinct phases: firstly, a consumer survey of 100 Internet users; and secondly, in-depth Internet user biographies with four respondents from the first stage, the latter stage developed via an online questionnaire, online diary, follow up interview and shadowing exercises.

Chapters 4 and 5 comprise the main empirical part of the thesis. Chapter 4 analyses the results of the baseline survey from stage one of the methodology. This stage of the fieldwork primarily aimed to give an overall view of Internet users' habits and motivations when shopping online. From this analysis, it was possible to form an Internet shopping typology where five distinct types of Internet shopping behaviour were identified. Chapter 5 presents the analysis of results from the Internet user biographies. This part of the research explores in more detail a small number of users Internet shopping experiences to form a more qualitative analysis than the largely quantitative analysis presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 6 draws together all the findings of the study and relates the results back to the original aim and objectives as outlined in section 1.2, above. In addition to this, the methodology used is critically evaluated and some final conclusions for the research are provided, including recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

The Internet, Shopping And Cultures Of Consumption: A Review Of The Literature

2.1 – Introduction

Spaces of virtual consumption are becoming an increasingly important part of peoples everyday lives (see Mansvelt; 2005 for a detailed review). This study aims to critically explore the geography of online retailing in cyberspace, especially its influence on consumer shopping behaviours and ‘cultures of consumption’ (Chapter 1). In terms of this overall interest, three core elements to the project can be identified. These are: cyberspace, consumption and retailing. The following literature review will consider the relationship to published work and begin to conceptualise the geography of online retail and consumption. The rest of this chapter is structured as follows. The remainder of the introduction will define the three core elements set out above. First, the geographies of consumption literature will be examined in more detail, considering the pivotal role that consumption plays in our everyday lives. In particular, the historical aspects of consumption will be briefly explored, identifying a series of ‘revolutions’ in British consumption and retailing practices since the nineteenth century. One of the core arguments running through this chapter is therefore to identify the need to contextualise Internet shopping habits both historically and geographically. The review next turns its attention to the main emphasis of this project: the Internet and its use as a place for shopping in contemporary society. It starts by looking at the geographies of cyberspace literature, including cyberspace as a place, its role in identity construction and interaction on the Internet, and Internet user behaviours. The subject of retailing in cyberspace will then be considered in more detail. The final section of the review concludes by outlining a broad conceptual framework for the project. This framework will help to inform the development of the methodology and the empirical analysis, including a finer grained conceptualisation of online retailing in Chapter 5. The chapter ends with a short summary.

2.1.1 – Cyberspace

Adams and Warf (1997; 139) argued that ‘the invention and diffusion of the computer are arguably the defining social, economic and geographical processes of the late twentieth century’. They also suggested that the ‘the pervasiveness of computers can

create a feeling of living in a digital environment, and terms such as cyberspace...imply an environment that may be understood in geographically resonant terms'. The phrase cyberspace was first coined by William Gibson in his 1984 novel, *Neuromancer*. The book termed cyberspace as '...an alternative world conjured up by a computer in which people could cruise like disembodied spirits amongst virtual computer-generated landscapes' (cited in Johnston et al; 2000: 147). Spiller (2002; 7-8) highlights the disparities between authors in defining the term cyberspace. Definitions cited by Spiller range from Haraway and Turkle seeing it as 'a virtual adhesive, a space of hybridisation, or cathartic androgeny (sic)' to a number of authors, including Turing and Babbage, who argue that the term 'would have no immediately apparent meaning' Spiller (2002; 7-8).

For the purposes of this project, a definition from Loader (1998; 16) will be used. This definition relates closely to Gibson's initial ideas, yet also encompasses the technological changes since 1984, stating that cyberspace is 'the virtual space created by the matrix of computerised telecommunications networks such as the Internet, where millions of individuals across the globe interact through discussion, business, information retrieval and a rich variety of other activities at any time of the day or night'. Further to this definition, Dodge and Kitchin (2001; 1) argue that: 'cyberspace does not consist of one homogeneous space; it is a myriad of rapidly expanding cyberspaces, each providing a different form of interaction and communication'. In this discussion, they usefully categorise these spaces into those existing within the technologies of the Internet, those within virtual reality, and conventional telecommunications such as the phone and the fax. In relation to this study, the prime focus is Internet technologies and spaces used for the purpose of buying various commercial products.

2.1.2 – Retail Geography and consumption

The geography of retailing is conventionally defined, on the one hand, as the study of interrelations between spatial patterns of retail location and organization, and on the other as the geography of retail consumer behaviour (see Wrigley and Lowe; 2002 for a detailed review). Retail geography is often situated at the overlap of related sub-fields, including economic geography, the geography of services and urban geography (Johnston et al; 2000: 713). In this project, the emphasis is placed on Internet shopping as a new 'alternative' retail enterprise (see Hudson; 2005, Murphy; 2007). It also attempts to contribute to a broader attempt within retail geography to

develop research projects that are more consumer focused and attempt to link elements of consumption and production together, as called for by Wrigley and Lowe (2002).

The term consumption has a variety of definitions. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2003) offers four useful starting points, with consumption defined as: 1) the act or instance of consuming; 2) an amount consumed; 3) use by a particular person or group, and 4) the purchase and use of goods etc. In terms of 'geographies of consumption', Johnston et al (2000; 108) define this field simply as 'the study of the geography of consumption'. Mansvelt (2005; 1) furthers this by stating that 'consumption is fundamental to how geographies are made and experienced in contemporary society', arguing also that 'geographies, as the spatial expression of social and physical processes, are in turn integral to how consumption processes are constituted and articulated'.

Having very briefly defined the core elements of the project, the review turns now to tease out the geographical aspects of consumption with a view to informing how we understand the Internet and related buying behaviours.

2.2 – Geographies of Consumption

Various geographers have pointed to the importance of consumption as an object of study (Crang; 2005, Mansvelt; 2005). As Edwards notes (2000; 5), there are 'few areas of everyday life not affected by or linked to processes and practices of consumption'. Crang (2005) provides a number of examples of everyday activities which fit within this theory of consumption as a 'way of life'. These include: watching television, eating a burger, wearing designer label clothing, going clubbing, drinking a Starbucks cappuccino, going shopping or skateboarding. These everyday practices of consumption have, he argues, 'great significance, economically and culturally' (Crang; 2005: 360, see also Slater; 2002). Amin and Thrift (2004; xii) argue that consumption and the 'pursuit of prosperity...have always been a cultural performance'. These activities cannot be simply reduced to the separate spheres of 'culture' and 'economy', requiring, they insist, 'the use of a unitary term such as cultural economy' (see Slater; 2002 for a useful review of 'culture economy').

A number of geographers have written about the relationships between local geographies of consumption and global geographies of consumption, considering the

extent of the impact they have upon each other. Globalisation is a highly contested concept within geography and the wider social sciences. Cloke et al (2005; 606) define globalisation as 'the economic, political, social and cultural processes whereby: a) places across the globe are increasingly interconnected; b) social relations and economic transactions increasingly occur at the intercontinental scale; and c) the globe itself comes to be a recognizable geographical entity'. As they rightly conclude, these globalising processes do *not* necessarily mean that everywhere in the world becomes the same. In terms of consumption, globalisation is sometimes linked with concepts of cultural homogenization, cultural imperialism and / or Americanization (Mansvelt; 2005: 134). This is particularly well exemplified in geographical fields through the theory of McDonaldization.

The term McDonaldization was first coined by the sociologist George Ritzer and is described as 'the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world' (Ritzer; 1996: 1). McDonalds has more than 30,000 restaurants, serving almost 50 million people everyday in 118 countries around the world (www.mcdonalds.com). Aldridge (2003; 112) deems McDonalds as 'predictable' and 'safe'; 'wherever you are, you know what to expect'. This idea is broadly supported by Crang (2005; 367) who states that 'McDonalds are famed for their uniformity; the same décor, the same basic menu (with very small variations, such as McSpaghetti in the Philippines or the Maharajah Mac in India), and the same service style the world over'. However, whilst considering Watson's work on the cultural geographies of McDonalds in East Asia (1997) and Yan's work on McDonalds in Beijing (1997), Crang concedes that these characteristics may not be as much a force of 'cultural homogenization' as they suggest. In Beijing, for example, McDonalds has lost its American role as a place of fast and cheap food. Instead, it has become a middle-class consumption place, treated by diners as 'leisure centres', where people can escape from the stresses of urban life. Crang (2005; 368) thus concludes that 'the meanings and practices of consuming McDonalds...vary from place to place, from culture to culture'. This fits with Jackson's (2004;165) broader views on globalisation, preferring also to think about the world as a globalising one rather than already fully globalised, seeing globalisation as 'an incomplete, uneven and contested process: an unfinished project whose contours are shaped by locally specific social and cultural practices'.

In terms of this project, the notion of a local-global link to consumption is an important one. The Internet is one of the places where a local-global link can be seen most visibly and rapidly. Users can consume a vast number of different products and services from across the globe without having to leave the comfort of their own home. Catalysts for internet navigation also fit closely with the theory of McDonaldization. Google, the world's biggest search engine, for instance, has personalised engines for 160 countries in 117 languages (www.google.com), while Microsoft's web browser Internet Explorer is used by almost 60% of the globe's Internet users (www.w3schools.com). These examples point towards a possible "Googleization" or "Microsoftization" in terms of general Internet use. What is less clear, and of interest here, is how the Internet is used to buy (or support the purchase) of goods. Moreover, as the examples by Crang (2005) and Jackson (2004) suggest, the way people relate to and use globally available products can also be spatially and socially contested, leading to processes of differentiation rather than homogenisation.

2.3 – Consumer Revolutions

The literature reviewed thus far implies that retail and consumption are exclusively modern day activities. This is clearly not the case. Goss (2005; 259), for example, traces consumerism back to the sixteenth century, when nobles visiting the court of Queen Elizabeth wore 'fashionable dress to mark social distinction'. This literature review argues that the rise of consumption and retailing really began in earnest in the nineteenth century. From this beginning, a further three revolutions of consumption are tentatively identified from the literature. The following will look at these four phases in further detail, examining three common themes for each revolution: notions of identity, consumer-producer relations, and related spaces of consumption.

2.3.1 – Birth of a Consumer Society

It has been briefly mentioned that although a consumer society has existed in Britain since the sixteenth century, the real birth of retailing and consumption was during the nineteenth century. Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century consumption became 'an increasingly visible aspect of daily life' (Mansvelt; 2005: 37). At this point in history in particular, acts of buying began to make important statements about people's identity. This rise in consumption coincided with the increased availability of goods and services to the mass population. As a result of mass production, various

goods thus became accessible for the first time to the lower classes. This mass manufacturing of commodities also 'increased the separation of consumption from production' and 'marketing, branding, and advertising became integral...to the social construction of commodities' (Mansvelt; 2005: 37). Mansvelt goes on to recount a case study of how soap production and consumption changed during the late nineteenth century. At this time, soap became more obtainable due to improvements in the technology to produce the product, the improved availability of oil for the soap from the British colonies, and a growing middle class market. Soap was advertised by merging public and private spaces, with the private world of personal hygiene being brought clearly into the public domain (Mansvelt; 2005: 38).

2.3.2 – 'Cathedrals of Consumption'

The first true department store was the "Bon Marché", which was created by draper Aristide Boucicaut in mid-nineteenth century Paris. Boucicaut first devised the idea for this 'dazzling and sensuous' store when he visited, and became lost within, the Grand Exposition in Paris of 1855 (Lancaster; 1995: 17). Since then, the department world retail model has extended across the globe, especially in Britain and the US. The department store format was first used in Britain in the late nineteenth century as 'large-scale and fast-selling shops' (Walsh; 1999: 46). In terms of identity, department stores promoted shopping as a social activity. Wrigley and Lowe (2002; 171) term this phenomenon 'Shoptertainment', with one store offering 'an orchestra, art shows, tearooms and 'spectacular extravaganzas' in its auditorium'. In this way, department stores were offering more items for consumption than just those which were available for purchase. Consumers also came into closer contact with the products (rather than the producer / seller) by being able to browse different departments and physically touch goods. Crossick and Jaumain (1999; 9) state that department stores, or 'cathedrals of consumption' as they term them, were an evolution in retailing because they combined a number of characteristics from earlier shops in one place. These characteristics included their level of capitalisation, diversity of merchandise, methods of selling, and structure and styles of management.

2.3.3 – The Shift Out of Town and the Rise of Supermarkets

The second half of the twentieth century saw a shift away from traditional town centre shopping areas to purpose built shopping parks on the outskirts of towns and cities.

The world's first fully covered mall was opened in 1956 in Southdale, Minneapolis, combining both department stores, rows of shops and car parking. In the UK, shopping centres were slower to take off due to restricted planning regulation and higher land values (see Wrigley and Lowe; 2002 for details). The first shopping centre in Britain opened in 1976 at Brent Cross, London. Since then, a number of 'super-sized' malls have opened around the UK, including the Trafford Centre outside Manchester and Meadowhall in Sheffield.

Whilst a geographical shift from town centre to out of town is significant, perhaps even more significant is the concomitant rise of supermarkets. As Bowlby (1997; 96) noted, if the nineteenth century was the era of the department store, the twentieth century was the era of the supermarket. Supermarkets, which are simply defined as large format self-service food stores by Wrigley and Lowe (2002; 72), first came about in the late 1920s and early 1930s in the USA. As with malls, the UK was slower in terms of the uptake of supermarkets, and continued to be dominated by small independent retailers until the late 1980s. It was not until the 1960s and early 1970s that supermarkets began to take a foothold in the UK. Supermarkets are now a common and regular part of our shopping lives and an integral element of our weekly consumption practices. As Fine (1995; 146) remarked 'we go to supermarkets because they allow us to buy whatever it is we want'. In that sense, they provide a site of consumption where convenience and price are central, although producer-consumer relations are arguably significantly reduced. As Bell and Valentine (1997; 137) noted, supermarkets make their money by 'choosing in advance exactly what it is that we are going to want to buy', by inference editing out elements of consumer choice, although done in often subtle and implicit tones.

2.3.4 – Recent Alternative Spaces of Consumption: online retailing

Present-day consumption takes place in a number of different spaces. These include the 'conventional' spaces such as, supermarkets, shopping centres, department stores and the home, but are now also increasingly comprised of a number of 'alternative' spaces of consumption. Gregson and Crewe (1994; 6) have written widely, for instance, on car boot sales. They saw them as a 'quintessential postmodern consumption site, one which synthesises leisure with consumption...in a new spatial form...a place for buying and selling and a site for pleasure, somewhere to look, to wander, to rummage'. Another current and by now quite well surveyed 'alternative space of consumption' is the farmers' market. These markets have grown

in size and number enormously in the UK in recent years. They allow a place for local farmers, ideally within a 30-50 mile radius of the market, to sell their local produce (Ilbery and Maye; 2006: 4, see also Kirwan; 2004). Byrne Paquet (2003; 52) attributes much of this revival in farmers' markets – 120 towns and cities held one in the UK in 1999 and there are now over 500 – to a 'concerted effort by government and farmers' associations to resuscitate them'. Markets can be hugely important to small-scale farmers as they provide a significant source of revenue and means to add value to their primary produce. Crucially, they also represent an opportunity to re-construct producer-consumer relations via direct / face-to-face marketing, although as Holloway and Kneafsey (2000) note, they can also represent quite conservative ideals as well as 'alternative' spaces of consumption.

Mail order is an additional 'alternative' space for consumption. Forms of mail order retailing have existed in Britain since the mid-nineteenth century, brought about by a significant improvement in the reliability and cost of the postal service (Coopey et al; 2005: 14). However, the real boom in traditional mail order retailing started in the 1930s with the rise of consumer credit offered by retailers. This rise, punctuated by the Second World War, saw its heyday between the 1950s and 1980s (Coopey et al; 2005: 50). During this period, mail order was dominated by five mail order catalogue companies: Empire Stores, Freemans, Grattan, Littlewoods, and Great Universal Stores. By the mid-1970s, when mail order's share of total retail sales amounted to almost 5 per cent, the Post Office claimed that seven out of ten households were exposed to a catalogue supplied by one of Britain's 'Big Five' during the course of any one year (Coopey et al; 2005: 1). The main reason for this rise is attributed to the post-war consumer boom amongst the working classes.

From the 1980s to the mid-1990s the growth in mail order slowed as it became increasingly easier for people to gain credit. After this period the Internet also brought about a new form of home shopping and it is cyberspace and the growth of online retailing which is the central focus here (Coopey et al; 2005: 70). In relation to notions of identity, producer-consumer relations and spaces of consumption, Mansvelt (2005: 77) usefully summaries the implications thus: 'cyberspace presents possibilities for the creation of new spaces of disintermediation where consumers and producers are linked and commodities defetishized'.

These revolutions all have significance to this project because they have all influenced the behaviour and culture of the consumer. They also show the changing

link between the producer and consumer, with modern 'alternative' consumption practices potentially shortening these links. The next section will look more closely at cyberspace and address a variety of debates within current geographical literature regarding the geographies of cyberspace and online retailing.

2.4 – Geographies of Cyberspace

The Internet as a component of cyberspace is central to this research. The Internet is defined as an 'international network that links together thousands of computers using cable links and allows data to be transferred between each computer using the TCP/IP protocols' (Collin; 2000: 116). Anyone with a computer, a modem and a telephone can connect to a network and thus the whole of the Internet (Kitchin; 1998: 385). Although with the invention of mobile internet, through mobile phones and/or wireless networks, even this is changing. The Internet supports a number of services including email, the World Wide Web, file transfers and Internet Relay Chat (Gauntlett and Horsley; 2004: 219). In the UK, people's use and access to the Internet has increased dramatically in recent years. The Office for National Statistics reports that between 2000 and 2007 the percentage of households accessing the Internet had risen from 25% to 61% of the British population, accounting for approximately 29 million adults. This statistic shows the Internet to be a major cultural and economic resource for the British population, including, as recently reported, using it as a resource to procure goods, as well as communicate, download information, music and so on.

2.4.1 – Cyberspace from a Geographical Perspective

Kitchin (1998; 388) and Holloway and Valentine (2001; 154) agree that the study of cyberspace from a geographical perspective can be broadly split into social and cultural geographies and economic geographies. This discussion will briefly focus upon each of these two distinctive fields of geography. A number of studies have been conducted by social and cultural geographers on the characteristics of cyberspace, the ways in which people influence and are influenced by these characteristics and the behaviour of cyberspace users. For the purposes of this discussion, three main study areas have been identified. These are: i) space and place; ii) identity, interaction and community; and iii) behaviour. These areas all link to the overall aims of this project, providing conceptual foundations in terms of

understanding how people use cyberspace for social and cultural purposes, as well as using it to complete economic transactions (i.e. culture economy).

Human geography as a subject 'involves the investigation of the relationship between people and place, with different ideas of what... 'place' is having been adopted by different geographers at different times' (Holloway and Hubbard; 2001: 14). One seminal geographer in this area is Yi-Fu Tuan, who states that 'places can be as small as the corner of a room or as large as the earth itself' (1974: 245). Such places include the modern phenomenon of cyberspace. The term cyberspace literally means 'navigable space' and is derived from the Greek word *kyber* (to navigate) (Dodge and Kitchin; 2001: 1; see also the earlier definition above). Holloway and Hubbard (2001; 174) see the use of the word 'space' as a metaphor in this context, which they suggest 'is used imaginatively but not literally to think about the ways in which the Internet connects people and places'.

Research into cyberspace as a geography generally tends to look at the construction / deconstruction of place and the relationships between cyberspace as a virtual place as opposed to a 'real' place. Holloway and Valentine (2001; 153) state that the new technology of the Internet is a double edged sword. On the one hand, these technologies can be seen to annihilate the importance of place in the 'real' world, with peoples closeness of place no longer being based on physical location. For example, two people can sit on opposite sides of the world yet still maintain a 'closeness' and 'connection' through cyberspace (see also Holloway; 2002). On the other hand, Holloway and Valentine (2001; 153-154) see these new technologies as constructing new 'virtual' places, where 'disembodied communication facilitates...new modes of identity construction and the formation of 'virtual' communities. Walmsey (2000; 7) also sees the Internet as having both a positive and negative effect on place, putting forward three reasons as to why cyberspace can undermine or modify the urban fabric and urban lifestyle. These three reasons are: first, that cyberspace is altering the space-time continuum; secondly, that cyberspace is changing the basis for communication; and thirdly, that cyberspace is blurring the distinction between 'the real' and 'the virtual'. In the context of this study, this later point about blurring between the virtual and the real is especially significant. These reasons can have either a positive or negative effect on place depending on the perspective they are examined from. For instance, Walmsey (2001; 7) continues to say that 'cyberspace is attractive because it can be liberating. It can be thought of as providing an opportunity for some people to move from 'the here and now' into a

world with far fewer constraints'. This leads to the next area of social and cultural geographical analysis pertinent to this study, identity and interaction through communities, which is reviewed below.

2.4.2 – Identity and Interaction Through Community

The ways in which users form identities, interact and build communities in cyberspace are key issues to the study of the Internet, both by human geographers and other social science researchers. Identity can broadly be defined as, 'the distinctive characteristics of a person's character or the character of a group...' (Giddens; 1997: 582). One of the most important markers of an individual's identity is his or her name. In terms of the Internet, one's identity can thus be heightened, blurred or re-created. Coyle (1997; 9) stated that 'the Internet was designed for almost anonymous communication'. This is echoed by Fulcher and Scott (2003; 130) who establish that this anonymity means that people can 'assume, and play with, any identity they choose'. The creation of new online identities can cause aspects of real life identities such as race, gender, sexuality and class to be enhanced and diluted by cyberspace, depending upon the new identity the user wishes to adopt (Bell; 2001). In addition, Shyles (2003; 209) distinguishes body image as an area in which users can elaborate on the truth by creating a 'perfect virtual body' for themselves and, thanks to sites like 'Second Life', a virtual alter-ego. All these forms of identity creation and change form pseudonyms 'where a person takes a name which is not his legal one, and establishes a fake, but persistent, online identity...Everyone starts out with a pseudonym and ends up becoming the person represented by that name' (Dyson; 1998: 297).

Rheingold (1994; 5) described virtual communities as being 'social aggregations which emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace'. Traditional communities are centred around place, with common bonds and 'social interaction' also being key to their cohesion (Kitchin; 1998: 396). A large amount of research has been done on virtual communities, particularly concerning their foundation and governance. McLaughlin et al (1995; 102) argued that self governance through standards of conduct, the ways in which new users are welcomed and accepted, and the existence of silent members (so-called 'lurkers') creates solid social networks and ultimately forms and proves the existence of virtual communities. Rafaeli and Sudweeks (1997; 11) agreed that online communities do

exist, because if they did not users would not invest so much time and effort in online communications. Rafaeli and Sudweeks (1997; 11) also believed that 'interactive groups are more likely to sustain memberships, and yield other desired outcomes, such as symmetry in contributions, creativity and productivity, agreement, humor (sic), and sense of belonging'. However, there are a number of researchers who do not believe online communities exist. Robins (1995; 151), for instance, viewed them an 'Edenic myth', while Fernback and Thompson (1995; 8) argued that 'virtual community' is an amorphous concept due to the lack of shared mental models about what exactly constitutes community in cyberspace. What is less clear, and of interest here, is whether or not such virtual communities have relevance in the context of online retailing.

2.4.3 – Behaviour

The final area of cyberspace research is user behaviour. It has already been seen that cyberspace can give people liberation to attain new identities as well as being a place for a variety of types of interaction, which in turn form communities. Behaviour in cyberspace can be determined by a variety of different variables. Two which have been looked at by researchers are: 1) the characteristics of the person; and 2) the task they are using the Internet for.

One group of Internet users that has been studied by geographers is children. Leading the way in geographical research on children's use of the Internet are Bingham, Holloway and Valentine. Research published by Holloway and Valentine in 2001, for instance, found that the virtual spaces used by British children were often, but not exclusively, Americanized places. This was attributed partly to the disproportionate dominance of America in Internet technology. They also noted that 'American culture has not simply saturated British children's online and off-line experiences to such a degree that they enjoy the same cultural background as young people in America. Rather...American culture merges with British culture to produce a hybrid form' (Holloway and Valentine; 2001: 158). This echoes the points made earlier about global consumption cultures. Children interviewed also demonstrated place-rooted culture, searching for information and wishing to communicate with people who share similar place-rooted cultures. One interviewee, for example, commented as follows: 'I mean obviously I like sort of the people from Britain because there is a British thing that you know, you can't explain to foreigners' (quoted in Holloway and Valentine; 2001: 158). In a 1999 paper by Bingham et al, the

rise of a digital generation has been examined, where children are 'more Internet-savvy' than their parents and teachers. However, despite their technical competence in this area, young people are not emotionally competent enough to deal with the kind of material and interaction that they will encounter online. As noted here, the Internet thus contains a 'darker side', with problems of inappropriate images, as well as security and identity theft problems. This has led Bingham et al (1999; 665) to conclude that 'the Internet is not somewhere that they [children] should be allowed to roam without very strict controls'.

Bingham et al (1999) also touch upon the fact that children are susceptible to 'Internet addiction'. They suggest that the most vulnerable of these children are those 'who struggle in making relationships', suggesting that obsessive use of the Internet can interrupt children's ability to carry on with the rest of their lives, particularly in terms of 'intellectual and social development skills' (Bingham et al 1999; 666). However, Internet addiction is not limited to children. Greenfield (1999), for example, identifies three types of adults who are addicted to cyberspace. The first group he refers to as 'electronic vagabonds' who tend to surf the Internet for hours upon end, with no specific goal or obvious focus. The act of being online is in itself 'arousing'. A second group consists of those who become addicted to chat rooms, personals, and e-mail to the extent that 'they derive a significant portion of their social and interpersonal gratification from the social contacts they make and keep online' (Greenfield; 1999: 16). A third and final group includes those who compulsively access highly stimulating online tasks, such as excessive stock trading, pornography, gambling, shopping, or auctioning.

For this project, capturing some sense of wider Internet use will be important, including also the amount of time users spend online, although clearly some uses may be difficult to elicit. Evidence of so-called Internet addiction may also be difficult to determine, although clearly an important issue in the literature. Bing (2005; 176), for instance, gives a frank, self-confessed account of his addiction to eBay: an online auction and shopping site. In this article, Bing describes how he 'started small', with just one transaction, a historical camera that was so cheap 'he couldn't resist'. Whilst Bing tells of his eBay addiction in a humorous way, a number of major points are raised about addiction and, in particular, addiction to Internet shopping sites. Purchasing starts off, it seems, as being fun, a diversion from a long, hard day at work and then, after a number of weeks of bidding on items listed for auction and winning these auctions, the fun grows into an addiction (similar in pattern to other

addictions). Bing admits to 'checking the site...once an hour' yet attempts to justify this by claiming to know someone with a worse addiction than his who checks 'the stock market ticker every 30 seconds'. This point about addiction (in relation to consumer behaviour) is thus potentially significant for this study. The following section will further develop some of these ideas of purchasing and shopping, looking more closely at e-tailing: the activity of purchasing goods online.

2.4.4 – E-tailing and Shopping Behaviours

Regardless of the dot com crash of the early twenty-first century, e-retailing is still growing, particularly in eight categories: books; music and DVDs; food and groceries; sex products; games and software; electronic and computer equipment; travel; and clothes (Dennis et al, 2004: 2). Smith and Shivakumar (2004; 1201) have usefully categorised the behaviour of Internet shoppers into three distinctive areas:

1. *Browsing*: a type of shopping experience where consumers gain pleasure from the simple act of exploring e-tail sites;
2. *One-time purchasing*: where consumers visit a website just once to make one order - this is seen as the most popular Internet shopping behaviour; and
3. *Repeat purchasing*: where consumers visit the same site on a regular basis to purchase similar items (e.g. food products, electrical goods).

This categorisation clearly has some merits for this study, although the process of labelling shoppers as falling into one or another distinctive category is potentially questionable. Smith and Shivakumar (2004; 1202-1203) also identify three consumer characteristics related to online shopping. The first of these is the *amount of perceived risk*. The less perceived purchase risk the more willing the consumer will be to purchase. Risk can include financial risk, performance risk, psychological risk, physical risk, social risk and time risk. The second is *willingness to purchase*. Traditionally this can be based on three factors – purchasing intentions, gift-giving and word of mouth. This is slightly altered, however, in the case of online shopping as consumers do not invest as much time and physical energy into shopping, making consumers more likely to just browse and/or gather information without having real purchasing intentions. The third characteristic is *self-confidence*. For example, confidence in choosing a particular brand or confidence in their own judgement.

Online food retailing has been of interest to some human geographers, especially

economic geographers, as well as some agro-food geographers (see Hudson; 2005). Bell and Valentine (1997; 3) stated that in 'modern Western societies, food has long ceased to be merely about sustenance and nutrition. It is packed with social, cultural and symbolic meanings'. In 2001 Tesco online was getting more than 70,000 orders each week, showing the sheer scale of online food retailing. This success can be put down to three reasons: first, it is built around actual supermarkets, with employees picking the products off the supermarket shelves; secondly, this also spreads the risk, as the online branch of the business is not essential to the viability and continuation of the business; thirdly, the compact nature of the UK makes easy delivery possible (Byrne Paquet; 2003: 136, see also Murphy; 2007). However, food e-tailing is not confined to large supermarkets. There is also a large market for niche-market, speciality food products which are often marketed in association with markers of "quality" and "locality". This latter trend has become particularly important in relation to recent food and farming 'panics' (such as BSE or E-coli). Holloway (2002; 73-76), for example, presents two case studies of speciality online food retailers. The first of these is myveggiepatch.com, which offers urban consumers the chance to have their specified organic vegetables grown for them on a plot of land in Suffolk. For a monthly or annual subscription consumers are sent photographs of their plot of land and asked for input into the growing and management of the crops. Once the vegetables are grown, they are packed and sent to the customers door. The second food e-tailer described by Holloway is the opportunity to 'adopt a sheep' in the North Italian mountains. For an annual fee, consumers can adopt a sheep. In return for maintenance and rearing expenses, they receive produce including lamb, milk, cheese, wool and even manure. The charge also guarantees the protection of the land the sheep lives on. This scheme thus creates a multi-sensual bond between the consumer and the place in which the produce comes from, giving a more inclusive and satisfying role to the consumer in their food purchasing, especially as a means of giving something back to the land.

These latter examples thus align closely with the earlier comments about online retailing (or certain forms) as representing 'alternative' consumption practices and modes of producer-consumer connection, although clearly some more 'mainstream' online practices are also evident. To date, much of the literature focuses on the e-tailing sites themselves. Murphy (2007: 941-953), however, looks more at the retailers involved in online grocery shopping and identifies three types of "electronic grocery shopping enterprise" (EGS):

- “Bricks and clicks”: large supermarkets which use staff who roam the aisles picking goods for each order;
- “Pure-play”: separate companies who use purpose-built warehouses to fulfil orders; and
- “Infomediaries”: existing smaller retailers who employ an intermediary to manage the web-based side of their business.

While all these types of EGS currently exist, Murphy concedes that the “bricks and clicks” model, as seen with UK stores such as Tesco, dominate consumers online food purchasing preferences. The reason for this is because of the ease with which they can include an online shopping capability into their current store infrastructure. Online grocery shopping is seen as extremely important to Murphy in encouraging consumers to explore other areas of Internet shopping apart from food. This is because online food shopping is a relatively inexpensive and frequent activity, and as such consumers build “familiarity and trust in e-commerce” (Murphy; 2007: 951).

2.5 – Conceptual Framework

Table 2.1 outlines a broad conceptual framework for the study and summarises the main topics addressed in the literature review regarding online retailing. In this research, the intention is to give primacy to the consumer and to ask consumers about their Internet shopping behaviours and use as a way of clarifying the types of sites people use and what this tells us about contemporary cultures of consumption in relation to online shopping. This will be achieved by first speaking to a range of consumers and then ‘following’ how four of these consumers use the Internet to hopefully capture (and build up a more detailed understanding of) buying behaviour. This will help to confirm or contest the assumptions outlined earlier by Smith and Shivakumar (2004) in addition to the browsing, buying and other online habits, including possible Internet addiction.

Another factor in online consumption is the amount of trust a user has in the website they are purchasing from. The main way in which trust can be potentially conveyed on the Internet is through the design of the website. If a website appears to be professionally designed and has certain markers of trust and the user feels assured that they are not risking their money they may be more inclined to use the site. Web site design also has a number of other factors in the overall enjoyment and inclination

to purchase. This can include layout, ease of use, colours, text size, types of pictures used and wording of text. All of these aesthetic features are believed to have an influence on consumer behaviour.

Table 2.1 – Framework to understand online retailing

Consumer Behaviour		Cyberspace		Web Design (producer / retailer)
	↔		↔	
Browsing / Buying	↔	Connectedness	↔	Layout
Habits	↔	Virtual community	↔	Content
Addictions	↔	Trust / ethics	↔	Design / graphics

2.6 – Chapter Summary

In summary, this review of the literature has shown that there has been a significant amount of research on each of the three main elements of this project - consumption, retail and cyberspace. However, it has also highlighted a gap in the literature and the need for a study that incorporates these three topics. This study aims to do that by critically exploring the geography of online retailing in cyberspace, especially its influence on consumer shopping behaviours and cultures of consumption (Slater; 2002, Mansvelt; 2005). Since the nineteenth century, a number of 'consumer revolutions' have occurred, each of which demonstrates innovative media for the pursuit of consumption. However, whilst being innovative, each revolution drew upon its predecessor in small ways. In particular, three evolving processes could be seen in each revolution: notions of consumer identity, the relationship between the consumer and producer, and the space of consumption. The current retail revolution encompasses the Internet as an arguably "alternative" space for consumption. This final revolution forms the basis for this study. The next chapter will describe, in more detail, the methods used to carry out this research, including data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3

Research methodology

3.1 – Introduction

The previous chapter established the consumer and consumption as the main focus of the research. Three main themes of retailing, consumption and the Internet were reviewed. Areas of particular interest include the different types of behaviour displayed by online shoppers, how and why people first started to use the Internet for shopping and to what extent this has become part of their everyday lives.

The rest of this chapter will describe, in more detail, the research methods and techniques used for this project. The chapter will be structured as follows. First, it briefly reviews some of the main ways other researchers have studied the Internet to identify key methods employed in Internet research. This review will help to show how this project hopes to build on some of that work, both in terms of the questions asked and the approach adopted. The two main stages employed as part of the research methodology for this thesis will then be explained. The chapter ends with a short summary.

3.2 – The Internet: A Review of Past Methodologies

This section will look at how other researchers have studied areas of cyberspace, particularly those connected with online retailing. The vast and diverse nature of cyberspace means that the study of it is equally diverse (see, for example, various articles in Wellman and Haythornwaite; 2002). The purpose of this review section is to consider a selection of key research papers that have used different methods to study the Internet. Eight different pieces of research are considered, some from a geographical standpoint and others from outside the discipline. The review will summarise the research topics covered, the methods employed and provide a critique of these. In doing this, the key methods for the present study can be elicited and justified. The review of methods will therefore go some way towards informing the research framework used in this study. It is worth noting that the selected papers are illustrative, especially in terms of method or research focus. They are not intended to be representative of all methods employed to study the Internet, but instead provide an indicative guide to frame and support the approach adopted here. The main points from each paper are summarised in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 – A Review of Methodologies Used to Study the Internet

Author	Research Focus	Methods Used	Critique
1. Chen et al (2002)	Examine how the Internet has evolved across the world by considering its global users and uses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used Survey2000, sent to visitors on the National Geographic website. • 20,282 adults from 178 countries completed the questionnaire. • Questions on the activities people carried out both on and off-line. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey published in English - does not reflect all global users. • National Geographic attracts a well-educated / wealthy readership, so sample bias? • Only uses a large-scale survey.
2. Copher et al (2002)	Examine the impact of email on modern day communication and everyday life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare 23 heavy (>35 emails per week) and 22 light users (< 7 emails per week). • Three methods: week long communication diary; follow-up social network survey; and face-to-face interview. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only focuses on email use. • Definition of 'heavy' and 'light' email usage seems low.
3. Hampton and Wellman (2002)	Study of 'Netville', a development of 109 medium-priced detached homes in a Toronto suburb, each with high speed broadband.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used ethnographic fieldwork and a cross-sectional survey. • Researcher lived in Netville for 2 years, conducting participant observation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well researched. • Useful insights on place perception, social networks, work and experiences with technology.
4. Lunn and Suman (2002)	Examined factors influencing online shopping.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted interviews with 2006 households through all 50 states of America. • Used a Random Digit Dial telephone sample. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful survey of online retailing. • Those aged 12 and over could take part; parental permission needed for those under 18.

5. Parr (2003)	Study of health and illness information available online.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of relevant websites and chat rooms. • Basic content analysis of the sites. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interesting use of content analysis. • Suggests need to use other methods to compliment.
6. Holloway and Valentine (2001)	Analysed Internet experiences of British children aged 11-16.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 semi-structured interviews from varied social backgrounds. • Varied levels of Internet access. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews seem to have worked well – opportunity for respondents to talk about experiences.
7. Smith and Sivakumar (2004)	Studied how information flows influence consumer online buying behaviours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on a review of other studies of Internet shopping. • Produce a model of different Internet shopping behaviours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-reliance on past studies / secondary sources. • Do not support claims with own surveys.
8. Holloway (2002)	Survey selected sites selling quality food products.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content analysis of two websites to understand how users experience the sites. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good use of content analysis. • Does not speak to consumers.

The analysis of other academic studies on the Internet in Table 3.1 has shown that there are many ways to approach researching the Internet. Common methods used include questionnaire surveys, face-to-face interviews and content analysis, as well as ethnographic work. Some authors have also attempted to make use of the Internet as part of the research process, using, for example, online questionnaires or through the analysis of material available on particular websites. Some of the studies outlined above have examined certain aspects of online retailing. Lunn and Suman (2002), for instance, show that online shopping behaviours are dependant on online know how. The more experience someone has had using the Internet, the more money they spend online. Quite a few of the studies listed above make assumptions about consumer behaviour, based on secondary sources or web based analysis (e.g. Holloway; 2002, Smith and Sivakumar; 2004). Very few in this list of papers (or the wider literature) talk directly to the consumer about their behaviour or online experiences.

Taking these factors into account, this study adopts a mixed method approach, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. More specifically, the following methods

were employed: questionnaires, interviews, and “shadowing”. From the review of past methodologies, it is hoped that the research will add to the literature both in terms of generating new empirical data about Internet users and shopping and crucially also in terms of how the Internet is studied. Significantly, rather than giving priority to the sites of production and retail, as has happened in previous studies, this thesis will focus primarily on the consumer. The research process for this study was therefore split into two stages – consumer surveys and Internet user biographies. These will be described more fully below.

3.3 – Phase One: Consumer Surveys

Initially, a weblog (blog) was set up on the Internet. Blogs started in 1997 as a small number of websites which contained a mixture of links, commentary, personal thoughts and essays. With the invention of the blogger.com site in late 1999, blogs began to take on a number of guises. Blogs are now best known as online journals. Many still contain the original features but most contain some kind of diary which welcomes comments (www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html). It was decided that a blog would be created using blogger.com for this project. This was set up in August 2006 and consisted of an initial post which outlined the nature of the project. Readers were invited to comment on the project and/or to get involved with the research. It was decided to use this as an initial means of discussing the way people use the Internet to buy things and also to help identify possible themes for the questionnaire. It was also felt important that when studying the Internet it should be used in some way during the data collection process. Unfortunately, this method did not have the desired results, with the blog receiving no comments and only a handful of visits in the first couple of months. One of the main reasons identified for this method failing was that it was extremely difficult to recruit participants, possibly because potential respondents would need to find the blog for themselves and then have the motivation to leave comments.

The blogging method was eventually abandoned. Given the positive experiences reported in the literature, it was decided that the Internet would still be used as part of the research, with Phase Two re-designed to accommodate an online survey (see below). Before this, the first stage of the research involved a baseline survey of Internet users using questionnaires. Before deciding on the type of questionnaire to use, a number of considerations had to be taken into account. Cloke et al (2004; 132) state that questionnaires can take three basic formats: 1) a questionnaire that is

posted / emailed or handed to the respondent who then completes it independently and posts it or hands it back to the researcher; 2) a questionnaire that is carried out over the telephone; and 3) a questionnaire which is conducted face-to-face. Cloke et al (2004; 133) go on to outline the advantages and disadvantages for each of these types. From this, it was decided that this baseline consumer survey would be conducted face-to-face.

Some advantages of face-to-face questionnaires include avoidance of refusal bias, meaning that you set a required respondent number and keep surveying until the required number of responses has been reached. There is also a control over who completes the survey. Questionnaire design is also made easier as complex questions, slightly longer questions and open-ended questions can be used more effectively. When considering questionnaire design it is also important to note the potential limitations and problems that may be associated with using surveys. When talking about Internet use and what types of goods or services users buy online it would be extremely unlikely that they would discuss anything that they may find embarrassing or private. As such, it may be the case that the surveys employed in this research have not uncovered the “whole” of Internet users’ experiences online; as noted in Chapter 2 there is a darker side of Internet use that remains undiscovered, although some academics are now beginning to explore some elements of this (see Don Slater’s work, for instance, on online pornography).

This survey consisted of 18 questions split into three sections: an initial section on users’ general Internet use; a more specific section on their online shopping habits; and finally a demographic section which gave profiling information for users. A copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix 1. Before the main survey was conducted, a pilot questionnaire was conducted with 10 people. Pilot questionnaires are important as they give the opportunity to fix 'any major defects in the questionnaire' before it is finally printed and administered (Flowerdew and Martin; 2005: 104).

After some minor adjustments (mostly in terms of clarifying the wording and order of questions), 100 Internet users were questioned as part of the main consumer survey. The main survey took place in Coventry during early 2007 and employed a purposive / stratified sampling procedure. In the first instance, passers by were asked if they were Internet users. Those that said they *were not* were thanked for their time and not considered for the survey. Those who said they *were* Internet users were asked if

they could spare a couple of moments to answer a short questionnaire on Internet use. If they agreed, the full questionnaire was administered. It was important to gain a cross-section of people of different age groups and genders that used the Internet. To make this stratification easier, a simple tally chart was kept as field notes to make sure that no one group was disproportionately questioned. Stratification was further ensured by conducting the survey on different days (including weekends), at different times of the day and in different locations around Coventry – both in the city centre and at an out of town shopping centre in the north of the city. At the start of the survey a brief explanation was given about the project and its purpose; respondents were assured that the information provided was confidential and that the results would be used for research purposes only. At the end of the survey each respondent was asked if they would like to take part in the next stage of the study and thanked for their time. These preliminary consumer surveys thus provided an initial baseline survey of Internet use in terms of retail and acted as a way of recruiting participants for the next stage of the research.

The results for the baseline survey were analysed by categorising and coding users' answers. Once a coding sheet was established the 100 responses were coded and entered into a database. Once the database was assembled, some basic statistical analyses were conducted, especially cross-tabulations to identify significant patterns or trends in terms of Internet use and the relationship with gender, age, etc. The analysis was completed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel.

3.4 – Phase Two: Internet User Biographies

The second stage of the research has been described as 'Internet user biographies'. In the baseline survey respondents were asked whether they would consider participating further in the study. Eighteen people (23% of surveyed online shoppers) stated that they would be willing to take part. The answers given by these 18 people to the questions in Phase One were then re-analysed, looking particularly at: how they used the Internet, both in general and for shopping purposes; where they primarily used the Internet; their socio-demographic profile; and the overall quality and diversity of their answers. From this initial group of 18 respondents, a shortlist of five people was compiled and they were contacted and asked if they were still interested in participating further in the study. One of the five withdrew their original offer to help further, leaving four participants for the Internet user biographies. This short-listing and re-analysis of Phase One answers was an important sampling

exercise as it ensured that the four case studies could be selected and developed to reflect people who used the Internet in different ways, for potentially different reasons and to buy different things.

The biographical method adopted here builds on consumer biography work conducted by Cook et al (1998) on food purchasing habits. For this study, it consisted of three different techniques: an online survey; interviews / shadowing; and diaries. The purpose of this more qualitative stage of the analysis is thus to develop a more detailed level of understanding about how the Internet is used to buy goods. The sample is therefore purposive and builds on the baseline responses in stage one. The following paragraphs in this section describe each of the three techniques in more detail.

The initial stage of the second phase of the research was an online survey. This was set up by writing a relatively straightforward HTML programming code which was hosted using the website domain name www.coventry.at. This stage was included after an earlier attempt to incorporate the Internet through blogging had failed. It was possible for an online survey to be used successfully here as respondents for Phase Two had already been recruited through the questionnaire survey and so it was possible to direct them to the online survey. Chen et al (2002; 83) state that a “web-based data collection method” is good because it is “innovative, convenient, cost-effective, wide-ranging and produces a large sample”. While not all of these factors were relevant for this study, it was felt important that the Internet was used in some way to interact with participants, especially as it also allowed for a more interactive survey to be administered.

The online questionnaire was split into three main sections: first, a brief review of users’ basic online shopping tendencies; secondly, a set of questions about users’ online shopping experiences in the past twelve months; and finally, an interactive section where users were asked to view and compare different types of websites (a copy of the online survey questions is available in Appendix 2). The selected sites were two online auction sites, two online book retailers and two online food sites. The online survey was used at this stage so that some of the key questions asked in the initial baseline questionnaire could be followed up in a little more detail. It also allowed for an overview of participants’ behaviours when shopping online to be gained, informing later stages of the biographies. The results of the online survey

were analysed by identifying key quotes and characteristics for each user, as well as looking for common themes / keywords across all four surveys.

The second stage of the Internet user biography was an interview and shadowing exercise. After users had completed the online survey, a visit was arranged with each of the four respondents. The visits took place in the participants' own homes or the place in which they primarily used the Internet. It was hoped that by doing this a greater feel for the respondents' lives and habits would be gained and also the participants would feel more comfortable and would behave as 'normally' as possible. The visits included both a semi-structured interview and a shadowing exercise. The visit started with a semi-structured interview with the respondents. These interview schedules were informed by the answers participants had given during the online survey. As Cloke et al (2004) note, semi-structured interviews have some pre-determined order, yet still remain flexible depending on how the questions raised are answered and developed by the interviewee. For this reason, they were elected as the most suitable interview method for this project. A list of questions were then devised for the interviews (a copy of the schedule can be seen in Appendix 3). These questions aimed to build on users' answers from the initial surveys, looking in more detail at demographics, general Internet use and online shopping use. As part of this, users were asked about their favourite general websites and their favourite websites for shopping. After the interview was conducted, users were asked to log on to their favourite websites for the shadowing exercise. This involved observing the participants while they used the Internet to browse for goods on their favourite sites. Throughout the process notes were taken on how the subjects were using the Internet, how they browsed, the sites they used and methods of paying for goods (if applicable). In addition to just observing the participants, some questions were asked about what they were doing and what they thought about the sites. This was done simply to clarify the actions of the subjects. Shurmer-Smith (2002; 91) states that observational techniques such as shadowing allow the researcher to see 'the ways in which different kinds of people use spaces'. In this case, the spaces were online retailing sites. The results for this part of the research were analysed by transcribing the interviews and then coding and analysing the transcripts to identify key quotes from the respondents. Field notes were also taken during the whole shadowing experience, particularly noting the ways people used the Internet and these were also analysed to inform the write up of the user biographies.

The final part of this biographical phase was a diary. Each user was asked to keep a two week long diary of their online activities. Participants were asked to make an entry every time they shopped or browsed for goods online. The diary could be kept either on paper and mailed at the end of the period or users could make their entries on the same site as the online survey (see www.coventry.at). In the diary, they were asked to give brief details of the websites they used, what they were looking for, how long they used the Internet, and what their thoughts and feelings were on the sites that they were visiting. Where purchases were made, online participants were asked to give further details on these purchases and their experiences. Kitchin and Tate (2000; 226) state that diaries are important because they 'provide a rich source of information concerning the personal feelings, opinions and experiences of the writer'. The diary entries were analysed to identify the number of entries and amount spent per respondent. Qualitative responses were also analysed, looking again for common themes and differences.

As noted earlier, discussing peoples' Internet use has obvious limitations. There may well be a certain amount of embarrassing and/or private information that the participants may not wish to divulge and this problem is as likely to be as significant here as in the earlier baseline survey. In addition to this, the positionality of the researcher is also significant. Clifford and Valentine (2003; 557) state that positionality is 'recognizing and trying to understand the implications of the social position of the researcher with respect to the subjects, particularly with regard to power relations or cultural differences that may influence the process of research and its interpretation'. For this reason, respondents were given a choice of where they would feel most comfortable conducting the interviews and shadowing work. As someone with a professional background in IT, web design and online researching, this is a topic that I felt well placed to research. I was also able to use this background to help relax the respondents, especially important when one respondent asked how I had come to the topic of Internet shopping. As Flowerdew and Martin (2005; 113) note 'you may find it easier to build a rapport with your research participants and conduct interviews if your project is linked to your own interests'.

3.6 – Methodological Framework

Table 3.2 provides an overview of the two phases of the methodology, the sample size, approach, and strengths and limitations of each method. The next two chapters

will introduce the main findings from the research, looking first at the baseline survey (Phase One) and then at the results from the intensive survey (Phase Two).

Table 3.2 – Methodological Framework for this Research

	Related Objective	Method Used	Sample Size	Approach	Strengths of Method	Limitations of Method
P h a s e O n e	1	Blog	0	Extensive	Used the Internet to study the Internet.	Lack of respondents.
	1	Pilot Survey	10	Extensive	Identified problems with the survey design and implementation	Some implementation problems were not apparent
	1	Baseline Survey	100	Extensive	Large, stratified sample.	Difficulty recruiting respondents.
P h a s e T w o	2	Online Survey	4	Intensive	Used the Internet to study the Internet.	Respondents may have given guarded or distorted answers.
	2	Interview	4	Intensive	Gave the opportunity to discuss answers and participants	Respondents may have given guarded or distorted answers.
	2	Shadowing	4	Intensive	Gave an opportunity to watch participants using the Internet.	Users may have been guarded or “unnatural” in their use while being observed.
	2	Diary	4	Intensive	Gave detailed information on specific shopping experiences.	Respondents may have given guarded or distorted answers.

3.7 – Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter has explained the methodology developed for this research. The analysis of how others have conducted research about the Internet influenced the methods used for the study. In particular, this project aims to speak to consumers in the first instance to see how they used the Internet to buy goods, including the sites they used. This avoids making prior judgements about the significance of some online sellers over others. It can be seen from the above that the techniques involved a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods and extensive and intensive approaches. Primary data were collected through blogs, questionnaires, diaries, observations, and interviews.

Chapter 4

Baseline Survey Analysis of Internet Users

4.1 – Introduction

The first step of the data collection and analysis stage was a baseline survey of 100 Internet users. Each user was asked to complete a questionnaire, a copy of which can be found in Appendix 1. Full details of the design and sampling for the survey are outlined in Chapter 3. This chapter presents the main results from the baseline survey of Internet users. From this primary stage of analysis, a number of things will be achieved, including: creating an overall demographic profile of Internet users; gaining some initial insights into people's Internet use and habits; and capturing the ways consumers use the Internet (or not) for online shopping. The results will help to create a typology of Internet shoppers, as well as helping to recruit participants for the next stage of the research – individual Internet user biographies.

The baseline analysis starts with the consumer profile. It then examines Internet usage and finally focuses on the ways the Internet is used for shopping. The material has been structured in this way to build up an overall profile of the survey sample, including some sense of general Internet use before examining patterns of consumption in terms of online retail. The final section of the chapter is important, in terms of informing the qualitative user biographies discussed in Chapter 5. The chapter ends with a short summary.

4.2 – Demographic Profile of Internet Users

The purpose of this section is to establish an overall demographic profile of respondents who use the Internet. The results show that 60% of respondents were female, with the remaining 40% being male. Although a greater number of females use the Internet than males in the sample, this is not intended as representative of all Internet users generally. There are a number of possible reasons for this difference. For instance, women were more prevalent in the areas and at the times of day that the questionnaire was administered; they were also more willing to stop and answer questions.

Figure 4.1 shows the age distribution of respondents, while Table 4.1 reveals the gender distribution across the different age groups. It is perhaps surprising that the majority of respondents (27%) came from the 35 to 44 years age group, given the Internet's apparent popularity with young people (see Bingham et al; 1999, Holloway and Valentine; 2001). However, the results for the under 18 category may be slightly misleading as the surveys were mostly taken during school hours. As might have been expected, the 65 years and over group contained no respondents. From field observations, this was also the group that mostly answered no to the initial screening question which asked whether people used the Internet or not. This finding is also in line with other studies that have profiled Internet users (e.g. Smith and Shivakumar, 2004).

Figure 4.1 – Age Groups of Respondents

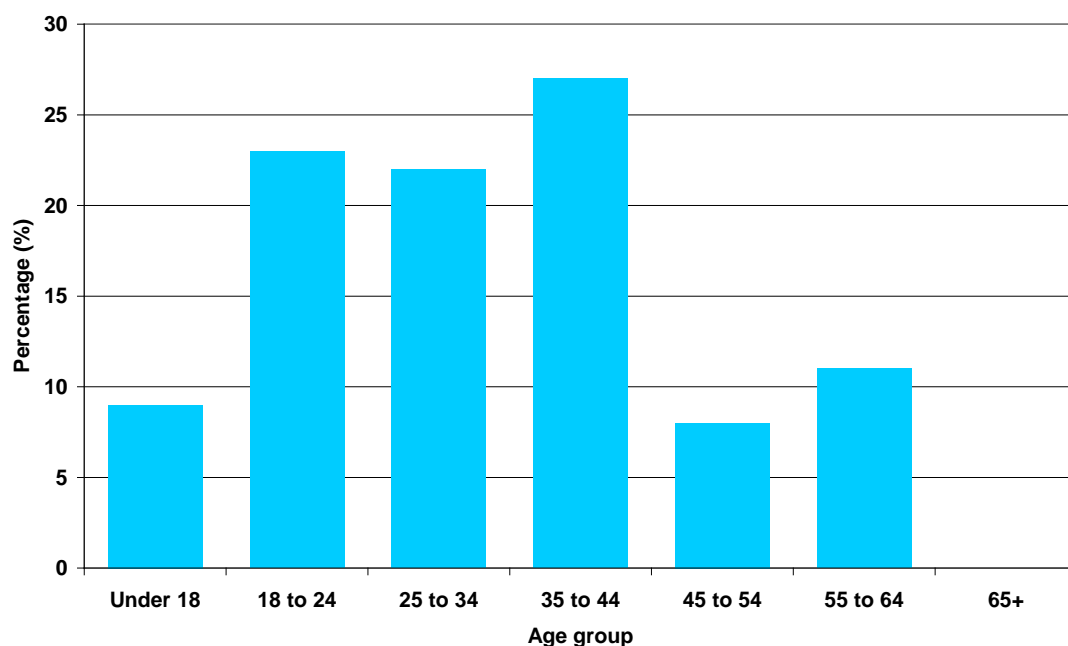


Table 4.1 shows that most of the age groups align closely to the study's overall gender split, staying relatively close to 60% female and 40% male. The one significant anomaly is the 45-54 age group with an 88% female to 12% male split. These figures, however, need to be interpreted with a degree of caution, given the relatively small numbers of respondents.

Table 4.1 – Age Group by Gender

	Under 18	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64
Male Percent	44%	43%	54%	33%	12%	36%
Male Number	4	10	12	9	1	4
Female Percent	56%	57%	46%	66%	88%	64%
Female Number	5	13	10	18	7	7

Table 4.2 shows the results for respondents' occupation. The replies given in the survey were placed into one of 11 categories. These categories are taken from the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2000 – the system for classifying occupation drawn up by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). There are two main concepts behind the groupings: a) the kind of work performed (job); and b) the competent performance of the job (skill). The categories work down from higher skilled jobs with more responsibility, such as Chief Executive, to unskilled jobs with less responsibility, such as Traffic Warden. As can be seen from the figures, the highest category is professionals. This again corresponds with past studies of Internet users, which argues that such user patterns are likely because these groups are more likely to be computer literate and/or using computers for their jobs, for example. The majority of professionals (62%) are also in the highest household income band. These results are set out in Figure 4.2.

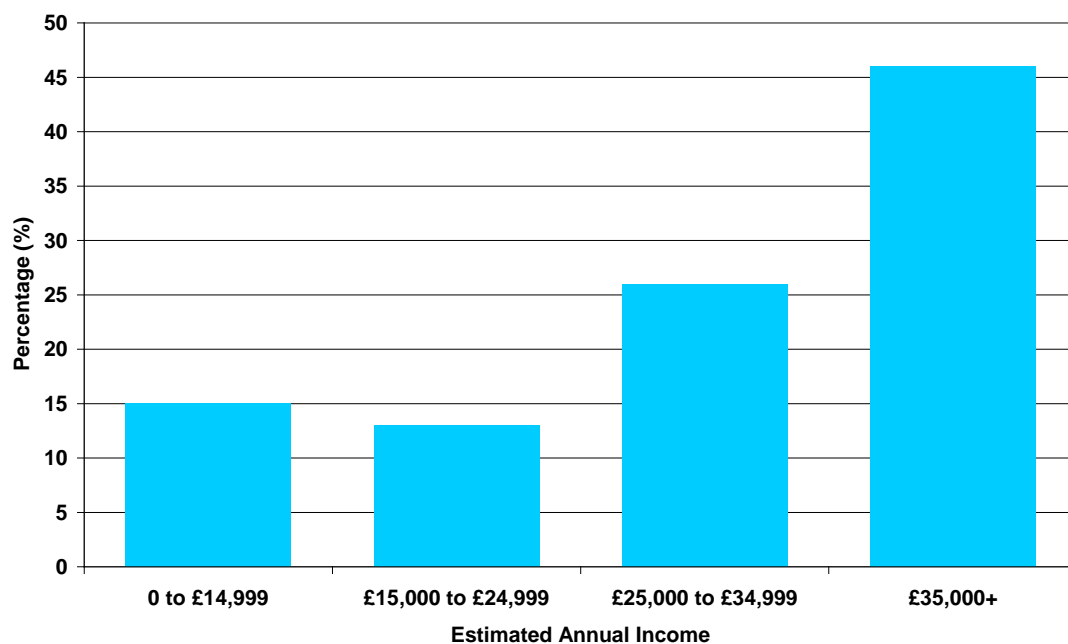
Table 4.2 – Occupation Classification of Respondents

Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2000	Percentage (%)
Managers and Senior Officials	9
Professional Occupations	29
Associate Professional And Technical Occupations	14
Administrative And Secretarial Occupations	15
Skilled Trades Occupations	9
Personal Service Occupations	3
Sales And Customer Service Occupations	1
Process, Plant And Machine Operatives	2
Elementary Occupations	6

Student	10
Unemployed	2
Total	100

As can be seen from Figure 4.2, which looks at estimated annual income of households, the vast majority (46%) had an annual income of over £35,000. This was a particularly important question in the context of this research – it would be expected that households with higher incomes would have more disposable income and therefore the potential to spend more money online. This overall pattern is confirmed by a cross-tabulation of estimated annual income and annual spend on online shopping. Over 73% of consumers who spent more than £500 per annum online reported having an annual income of over £35,000. This correlation between higher income and higher online spend has been reported in other studies. Lunn and Suman (2002; 567), for example, found that ‘individuals with higher incomes tend to...spend more money on the Internet’.

Figure 4.2 – Estimated Annual Household Income of Respondents



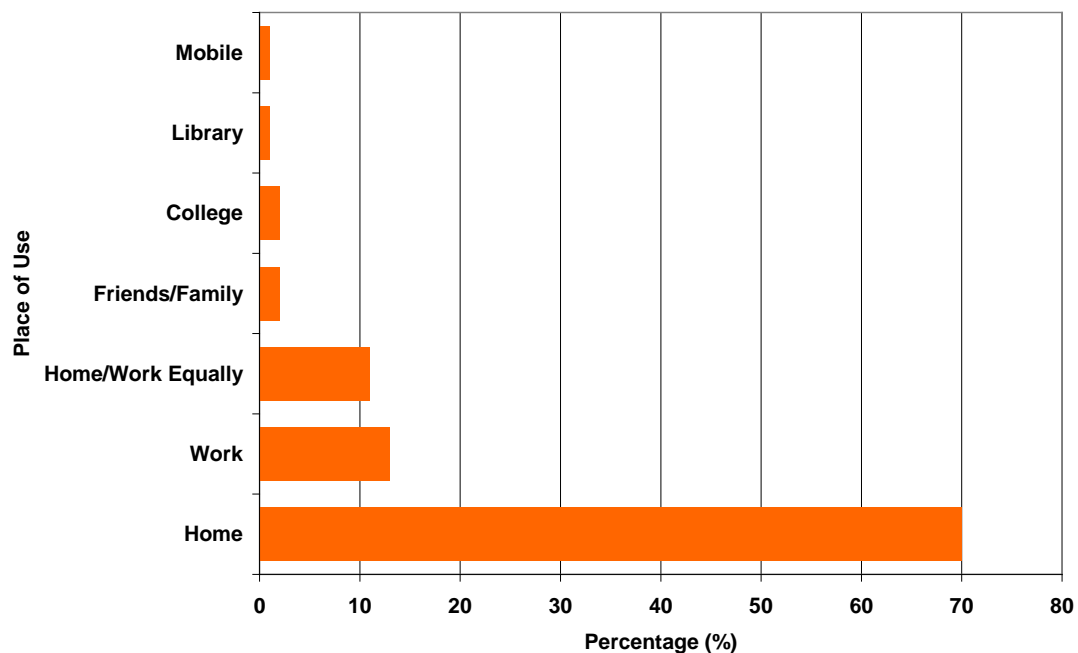
Other questions that formed part of the analysis for this section looked at household status. In terms of household status, 49% were a couple with children. This brief description of respondents' demographic profile is thus useful to contextualise the more extensive research phase.

In summary, the above patterns seem to largely comply with past surveys of Internet users. It is important, however, not to place too much emphasis on the significance and explanatory power of these general patterns and to recognise the significance of those marginal users who may not conform to 'static' consumption practices in terms of Internet use (see Mansvelt; 2005 for a useful wider commentary on this). The next section reflects more fully on patterns of Internet use.

4.3 – Internet Use

The survey started by asking people some simple questions about how and why they use the Internet. The objective was to provide an overview of online behaviour (including shopping, if applicable) and evidence of change over time. This is the focus of this part of the analysis. As can be seen from Figure 4.3, the vast majority of respondents (70%) use the Internet primarily at home. This in part may be due to recent advances in Internet technology and concurrent decreases in the price of having such technology in the home. This assumption is supported by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) who recently reported that between 2000 and 2007 home broadband usage in the UK rose sharply from 25% to 61% (www.statistics.gov.uk).

Figure 4.3 – Primary Place of Internet Use by Respondents



Figures 4.4 and 4.5 show users' primary Internet activities and how long per week they use the Internet for each activity, disaggregated by age group. Users were asked to list each type of activity and could pick as many from the list as desired. As can be seen from Figure 4.4, the majority of users (79%) stated that they used the Internet for general information. This type of use was especially favoured by the 35 to 44 age group. Of particular interest to this study was the fact that 64% of users stated that shopping was one of the main activities they used the Internet for. When asked directly about Internet shopping, this figure rises to 77%, although some on a less regular basis. According to a previous study of Internet use by Howard et al (2002; 63), these figures seem relatively high. Howard et al (2002) reported, for instance, that 47% of users classed buying products as a part of their online activity. Despite discrepancy in how users report the importance of online shopping, the survey results presented here suggest that this activity has increased since Howard et al's earlier analysis. Given increased availability of computers and Internet access, supported by greater public awareness and thus greater trust and familiarity with such technologies, this seems plausible.

The total time spent by all users on each activity is also revealing (see Figure 4.5). Web-based email comes out on top, with respondents spending over 55 hours in total per week on this activity, a particularly popular activity with the 18 to 24 age group. Searching for general information came second, with almost 51 hours per week. Time spent shopping for products also comes out relatively high, with a total of almost 20 hours. Each shopping user spends an average of 20 minutes undertaking this activity. Another interesting result to come out of Figure 4.5 was that the 25 to 34 years age group spent more time studying online than the typical student age group of 18 to 24.

Figure 4.4 – Percentage of Users Primary Internet Activity and Age Grouping

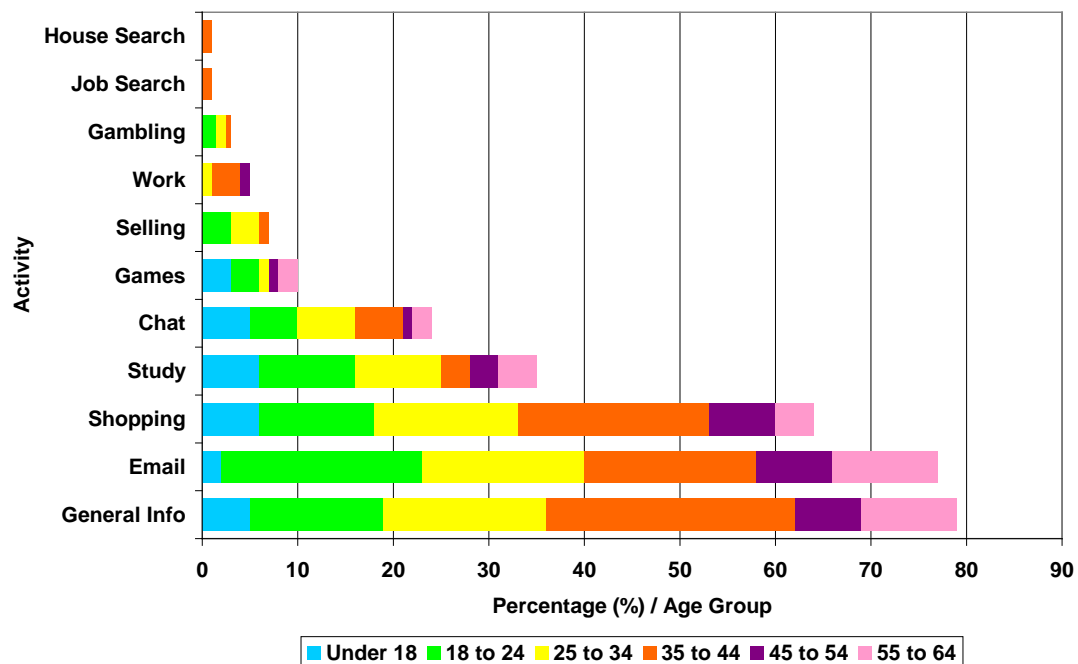
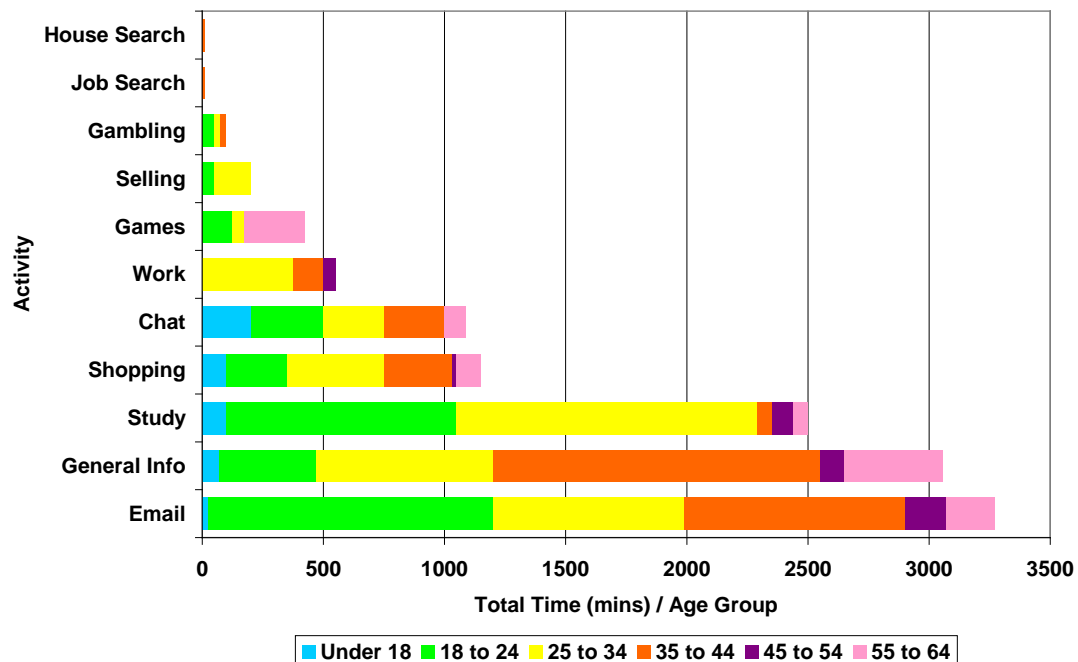


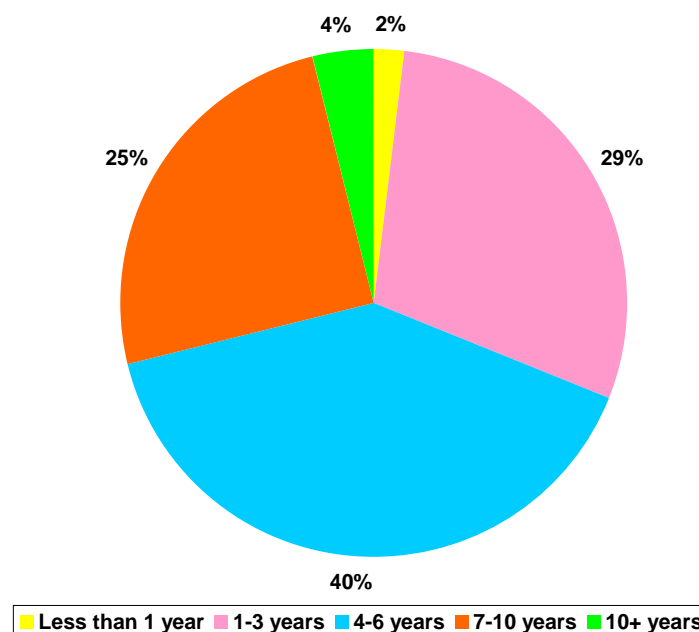
Figure 4.5 – Total Time Spent by Respondents on Each Internet Activity



Other results that can be drawn from analysing the answers to this question about time spent on different Internet activities includes the fact that on average each user performs three different activities online per week. Users also stated that on average they spend 10 hours 15 minutes per week on the Internet. What is perhaps most significant for this study, in terms of overall user patterns, is that despite other

differences in use, activity patterns remain fairly consistent in terms of shopping across the age groups, in contrast to the wider consumption literature which suggests such practices are often differentiated in terms of age. Figure 4.6 shows approximately how long users have been using the Internet. The most popular answer was 4-6 years. This places this group of people as starting to use the Internet between 2003 and 2005. This trend is supported by the ONS who note an increase in broadband use and Internet users over the last 6 years.

Figure 4.6 – Length of Time Respondents Have Been Using the Internet



The results in Table 4.3 show why people first started using the Internet. This again offers some useful general insights. Over half of the respondents gave education or work as the reason why they first used the Internet. This is understandable, as the Internet is widely regarded as a useful and well-used educational and information resource (see Walmsey; 2000). It should also be noted that before home use became popular, educational institutions and workplaces were some of the first places where people could access the Internet. Correlating the length of time a person has been using the Internet and their reasons for first using the Internet reveals some interesting results. For longer term Internet users (over four years), the majority (46%) started using it for educational purposes. For shorter term Internet users (under four years), the majority (35.5%) started using it for work. Crucially, when asked about why users start using the Internet, very few do so for shopping

(2%). However, as noted earlier, many do eventually use the Internet for shopping (64% - Figure 4.4). This suggests that users build up a greater range of uses over time, possibly as familiarity and confidence with such technology grows. Given the small sample, this needs further analysis.

Table 4.3 – The Reasons Why Respondents Began Using The Internet

<i>Reason For First Using Internet</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
For education	31
For work	19
Wealth of information	16
Curiosity	10
To access specific sites	6
Given a free subscription	5
Don't know	3
Communication with people around the World (including family and friends)	3
Because its convenient	3
Because its easy to use	2
For shopping	2
Total	100

Respondents were also asked directly about whether they used the Internet for shopping and the reasons why. When asked directly about using the Internet for shopping, 77% answered yes. This confirms the popularity of online retailing. It is also interesting that 77% answered yes to this question, while only 64% stated this as a main Internet activity when asked about all types of Internet use (see Figure 4.4). One explanation that may help clarify this inconsistency is that in reaction to Question 3 (about general use and time allocated to that activity) respondents were stating the main things they used the Internet for. If they did not use the Internet for shopping on a regular basis they may have found it difficult to enter a weekly amount and so left it out.

The 22% who responded that they did not use the Internet for shopping were asked to give reasons for not doing so. Table 4.4 gives the reasons why people *do* and *do not* use the Internet to shop, providing a useful insight into overall motivations. The main reason for using the Internet for shopping was because users believed it was

cheaper than the High Street. This is an interesting finding, revealing the continued importance of price and convenience in terms of shopping behaviours. One reason that online retailers can offer cheaper prices is the lack of associated overheads that come with a physical store. When analysing the types of people that did not use the Internet for shopping, some interesting results also emerge. Over 50% of respondents that stated that online shopping was too complicated, for example, were in the second highest age group (55 to 64 years). This group are less likely to be computer literate and it is therefore understandable that they report finding online shopping complicated or off putting.

Table 4.4 – Reasons For and Against Respondents Using the Internet For Shopping

Reasons For	Percent (%)	Reasons Against	Percent (%)
Cheaper	32.9	Complicated	25.0
Convenient	18.4	Security	16.7
Easier	17.1	No interest	16.7
Quicker	11.8	Can't afford it	12.5
More choice	9.2	Not allowed to at work	12.5
For specific sites	5.3	Can't see what you're buying	8.3
Can compare prices	3.9	Lack of time	8.3
Enjoy shopping	1.3		

The literature suggests that various factors determine whether respondents shop online, including demographics and familiarity and experience with using the Internet. The results were thus analysed to see if the length of time users had used the Internet influenced whether respondents shopped online. It was found that 81% of longer term Internet users (over four years) were online shoppers. In comparison, 71% of shorter term Internet users (under four years) were online shoppers. This shows that the longer a user has been using the Internet the more likely they are to shop online. The finding supports earlier work reported by Howard et al (2002; 63), although the contrasts in this study are less significant. When respondents were asked about whether they shopped online, 62.5% of longer term users in their analysis were online shoppers compared with 36.5% of short term users. In their analysis, they grouped respondents into four different typologies. Two of these groups were shorter term users (using the Internet for less than three years) and the other two groups were longer term users (using the Internet for over three years).

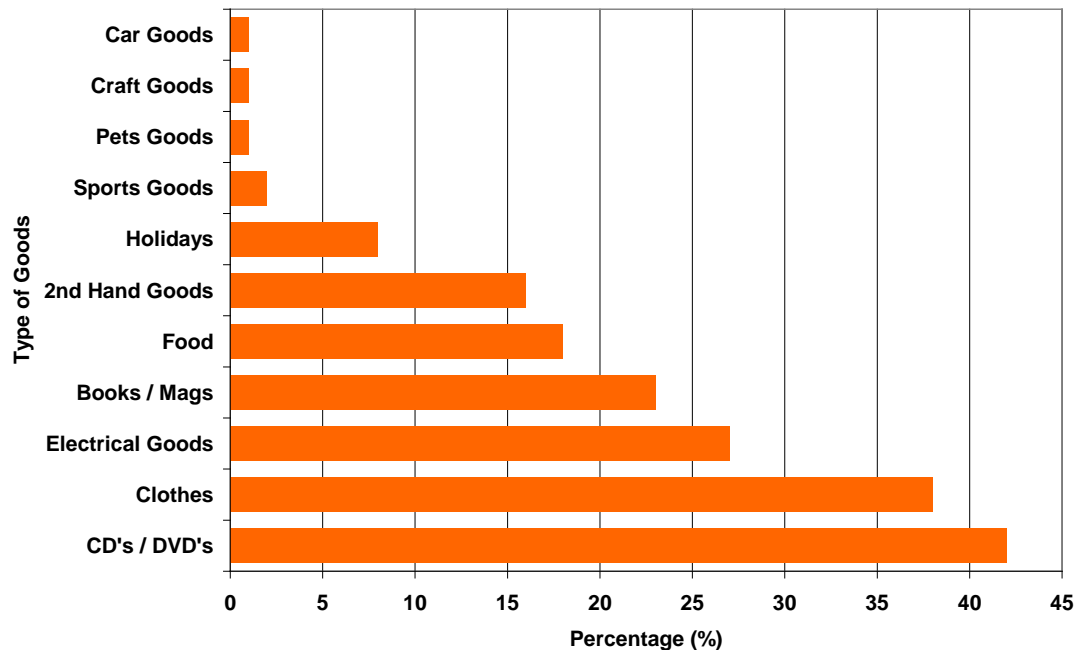
Whilst one needs to recognise that differences may emerge as a result of using slightly different systems of classification, the results here suggest that the length of time someone has used the Internet is now less of an issue in terms of determining whether someone will use it for shopping, partly because such practices are now a more widespread cultural phenomena. When comparing other demographic aspects with Internet use, it is notable that 57.7% of online shoppers are households with children compared to 19.2% who are single. One reason that households with children may be more inclined to shop online is convenience (see Table 4.4). In fact, Rodgers and Harris (2003; 324) cite convenience as 'the primary reason to shop online'.

4.4 – Online Retailing

The second part of the Internet user survey asked respondents who reported using the Internet for shopping to provide more details about the nature and pattern of their online buying practices. In total, 77 of the 100 respondents stated that they were online consumers. This section of Chapter 4 looks at these responses in greater detail. These results are important as they provide useful baseline information on people's online shopping behaviours and a list of the most popular sites used by surveyed consumers. Some of the more popular sites will be looked at in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Figures 4.7 and 4.8 show the results from Question 7 of the survey, which asked what types of goods people bought online and how long per week they spent purchasing these goods. Respondents were asked to list each type of product and could pick as many as were applicable to them. Figure 4.7 suggests that the majority of users (42%) used the Internet to purchase CDs and DVDs. One reason for this may be the cheaper prices for such items. Indeed, over 40% of people who used the Internet to purchase CDs and DVDs did so because of cheaper prices.

Figure 4.7 – Percentage of Users Buying Certain Types of Goods Online



Whilst the largest majority of consumers reported using the Internet to buy CDs and DVDs, Figure 4.8 shows that they actually spent the most total time shopping online for clothes. One possible reason for this difference could be that consumers may usually know what they are looking for when buying CDs and DVDs. Most stores generally sell the same selection of goods, so less time needs to be spent browsing for products and instead may be spent browsing for better / more competitive prices. Clothes, however, have many different factors that need to be considered (e.g. styles, size, cost), with stores often selling different products. On average users spent 90 minutes per week shopping online. This profile information does not quite fit with the earlier typology set out by Smith and Shivakumar (2004) who stated that the behaviour of Internet shoppers falls in-to one of three categories: browsers, one-time purchasers and repeat purchasers. Smith and Shivakumar's (2004) typology thus defines Internet users as falling into one static category or another, without taking account of variability dependent on, in this case, the type of product purchased. The results here suggest that the same user may adopt different shopping profiles depending on the nature of the product.

Figure 4.8 – Total Time Spent by Respondents Shopping for Each Type of Good

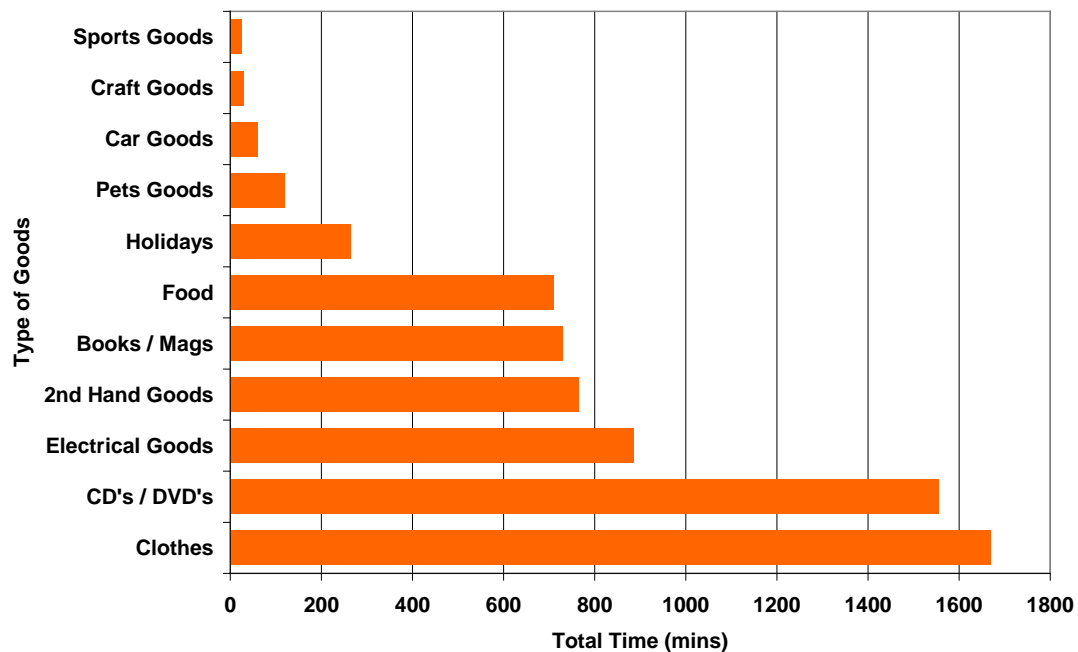
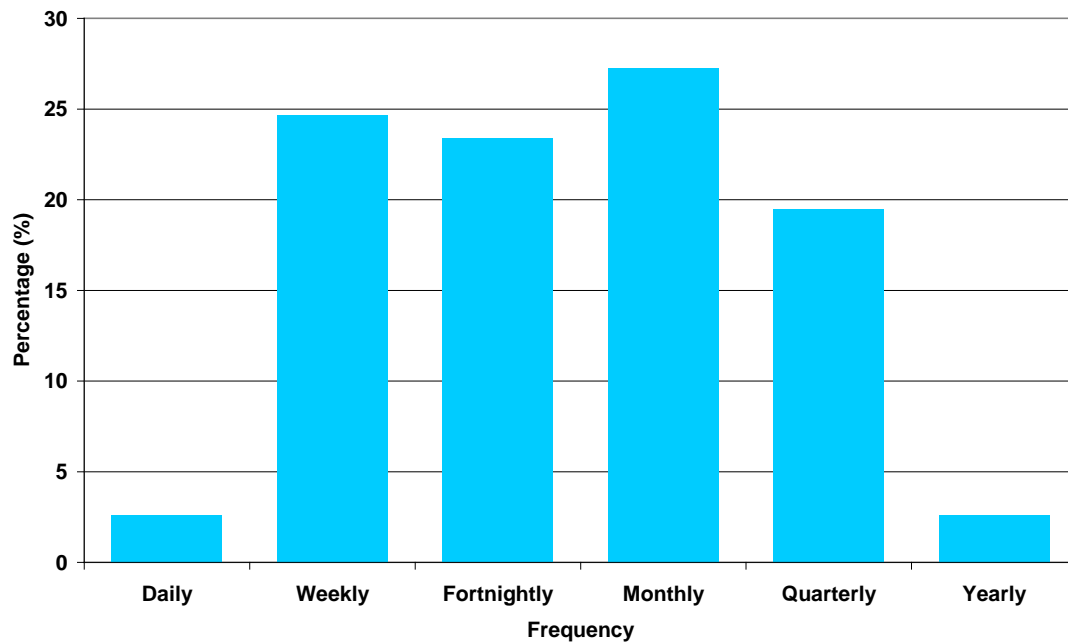


Figure 4.9 shows how often users purchased online. As can be seen, there was quite a spread of answers between the categories, with monthly marginally favoured by two percent of users. These results show that online shopping is a fairly regular activity in a number of surveyed households, although variable in the sense that some regularly shop weekly or fortnightly whilst others do so only every month, with some regarding it as something of a hobby. Comparing responses about frequency of purchase with consumer profile data reveals some interesting findings. In terms of high frequency online shoppers (weekly or daily), 71.4% are households with children. For these households, it may be that such technologies provide a convenient and flexible means of shopping. Significantly, 57.1% of those in the lowest annual income group shop online least frequently (quarterly and yearly). This is perhaps not surprising, as lower income households would have less disposable income to spend shopping. Although tentative, this result appears to confirm previous writings in the consumption literature which suggest shopping patterns are socially selective, determined in this case through socio-economic status (Mansvelt; 2005).

Figure 4.9 – Frequency With Which Respondents Purchase Online



Consumers were also asked to list websites that they used for shopping on a regular basis. In total, 67 different sites were given. Of these, only 17 were listed by more than one person and these can be seen in Table 4.5, along with the percentage of people who mentioned them.

Table 4.5 – Common Websites Listed by Consumers

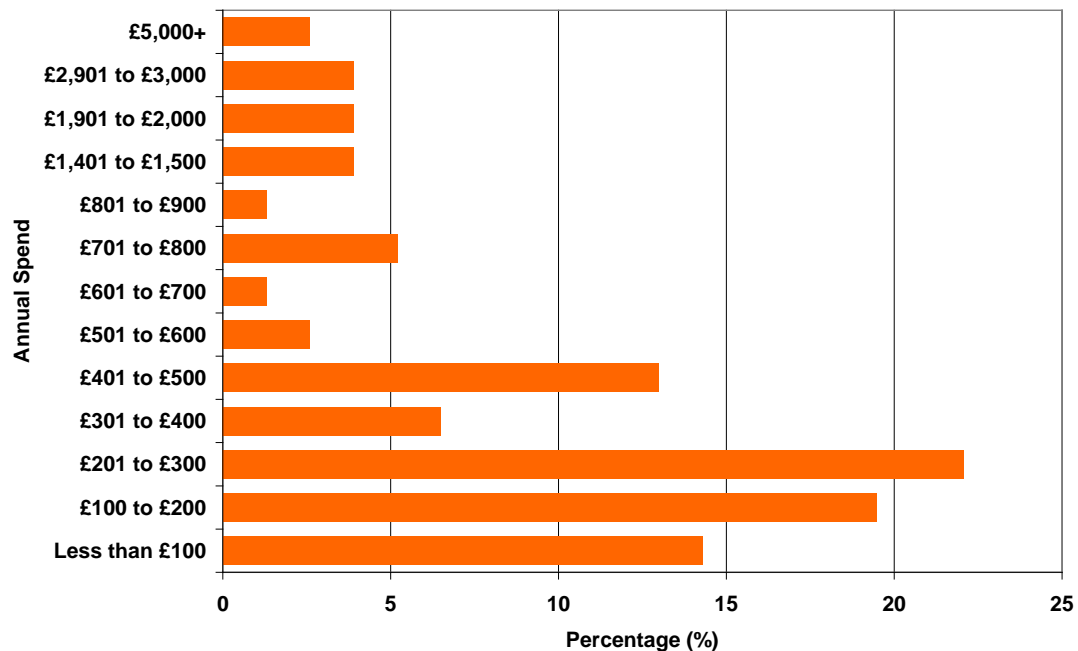
Website	Percent (%)
eBay	41.6
Amazon	41.6
Play	24.7
Tesco	16.9
Next	13.0
Argos	6.5
Currys	6.5
Sainsburys	5.2
M&S	5.2
Debenhams	5.2
HMV	5.2
ASOS	5.2
Comet	5.2
ASDA	3.9
River Island	2.6
CD Wow	2.6
Expedia	2.6

On average, each respondent mentioned three different sites, with six people listing no specific sites and one person listing nine different sites that they regularly used. Amazon and eBay are the two most referred to websites, each having 32 separate listings. This was expected, as eBay and Amazon are the only two consumer sites to feature in the Nielsen net-ratings (www.nielsen-netratings.com), which lists the top ten most visited UK web sites and are now widely regarded as significant players in the retail economy (see Hudson; 2005). Another interesting outcome was the types of goods sold through the most popular sites. Broadly, the commonly listed websites can be split into five categories, with some sites fitting into more than one group. These groupings are: food products (e.g., Tesco, Sainsbury's, ASDA, M&S); leisure and entertainment goods (e.g., Amazon, Play, HMV, CD WOW, Expedia); clothes (e.g., Next, M&S, Debenhams, ASOS, River Island); electrical goods (e.g., Argos, Currys, Comet); and second-hand items.

In terms of how much consumers spent annually online, the results reveal that most do not spend an overly large amount each year online, with respondents spending £492.60 per year on average (£41.05 per month). This fits with the results shown in

Figure 4.10 where the most popular annual spend category was £201 to £300, as chosen by 22.1% of respondents.

Figure 4.10 – Annual Online Spend (£s) by Respondents



Cross-tabulation of these data with results from the consumer profile data throws up some interesting results. First, 58.3% of those who spend more than £1000 online annually are professionals. This might not be surprising as over 86% of professionals fall into the higher annual household income categories. Another statistic that can be drawn out is that 66.7% of those who spend more than £1000 online annually are households with children, especially interesting when combined with the fact that these households are also the most frequent shoppers.

Overall, the results from the online shoppers section of the baseline survey provide an interesting insight into the characteristics of online shoppers. Socio-economic status and household profiles appear to be significant in terms of influencing those who tend to favour using the Internet for shopping. In terms of those people that do use the Internet to shop, the results also reveal some interesting things in terms of cultures of consumption (Mansvelt; 2005), representing quite standardised consumption practices in the sense that people often report using the same popular sites and report buying certain types of fairly generic product (e.g. CDs, books). Earlier arguments that frame the Internet as an 'alternative' consumption space /

experience are therefore more difficult to sustain, at least when consumers are asked about the types of sites they visit and the things they buy – many are either national or global Internet businesses or extensions of High Street or multiple retailers (see Holloway; 2002, Mansvelt; 2005 see also Murphy; 2007 in terms of Tesco's online service facility). Internet shopping may have moved from being an alternative form of consumption to one that is more 'mainstream' and part of most peoples daily lives. This 'conventionalisation process' mirrors other types of consumption such as organic foods (see Guthman; 2004), which initially started out as alternative and niche and eventually became mainstream, with large sales now through multiple retailers. Also significant is the fact that *the same consumer* may use the Internet differently according to the type of product they buy – as suggested when comparing consumption behaviours for CDs opposed to clothes. These results can be used therefore to help develop a framework and typology for online shopping, summarised below.

4.4.1 – Internet Shopping Typology

From the baseline survey results and the existing literature, it is possible to identify four main characteristics that appear to be significant in terms of determining patterns of online consumption: first, frequency of purchase, from high (daily, weekly, fortnightly) to low (monthly, quarterly, yearly); secondly, the amount of money spent online, from high (over £500pa) to low (£100pa or under); thirdly, the variety of purchase, from high (various types of goods) to low (under two types of goods); and finally, the relationship between browsing and buying. Using these core characteristics, five 'types' of *Internet shopping* experience can be identified. Crucially, the emphasis is placed here on '*online shopping experience*' rather than *type of 'Internet shopper'*, as there are likely to be occasions when a consumer can signify different types of shopping experience.

This classification is therefore alert to recent developments in cultural geography which warn against labelling and fitting, in this instance, consumers into static/rigid conceptual frameworks. For a similar perspective, see Fish et al's (2003) study of landowners and 'styles' of environmental stewardship, where they show how the same landowner can have different views and attitudes towards landscape conservation when discussing different parts of his land. It is equally important to recognise here (as hinted at in parts of the above analysis and explored further in Chapter 5) that shoppers are not anchored to just one type of consumption practice,

and have the potential to change their Internet shopping practices dependant on a number of external factors. This is in contrast to previous static typologies developed, for instance, by Smith and Shivakumar (2004).

The following looks briefly at each type of Internet shopping experience in a little more detail.

1]. Functional Internet shopping. This involves using the Internet to shop often for specific, non-perishable and widely available items. In this instance, shoppers tend to know what they want to purchase before logging on. They are less likely to spend a large amount of time browsing, going instead straight to the sites that sell specific goods. This functionalist nature of shopping is likely to take place on a consistent basis (regular or irregular), depending on the demand for the items purchased. Spending patterns may vary. The key characteristic is the type of items purchased, which tend to be functional / convenient.

2]. Bargain Internet shopping. This involves using the Internet to shop for cheap new or second-hand items, often using popular websites such as Amazon or eBay. Shoppers may know what they want, or may visit popular sites which they use regularly to identify potential bargains. The key characteristic is the price of items purchased – which must be cheap, often when compared with High Street prices. Patterns of spending / regularity may vary greatly between individual shoppers.

3]. Lifestyle Internet shopping. This involves using the Internet to shop and to also provide enjoyment; shoppers who use the Internet in this way are likely to see it as an important part of their lifestyle and identity and they may even class it as a hobby. Shoppers are likely to shop/browse online frequently and for a variety of goods (from functional items, to more individual purchases, including second-hand purchases). Consumers who demonstrate lifestyle Internet shopping characteristics are likely to spend large amounts of time browsing for items, relative to the amount spent online, which for some may include hunting out bargain items as well as more individualistic / adventurous products (e.g. sporadic, expensive purchases).

4]. Specialist Internet shopping. This involves using the Internet to identify specialist items, which may not be available on the High Street. In some cases, these items might cater for specialist interests or niche market products (e.g. the sale of records, specialist books, antiques) and may be available through specialist sellers or through

large sites such as eBay, although the incentive may not necessarily be to save money but to find items otherwise difficult to source. Spending may be spread across a number of different types of shopping areas and include a variety of goods. Browsing is an important characteristics of this process, as well as the specialist nature of items purchased.

5]. Discreet Internet shopping. This involves using the Internet to buy products / items that the user prefers to keep discreet or private – hidden from the gaze of the public eye. Obvious products are those associated with the pornography industry, but may include also items related to embarrassing medical conditions, for example. The key characteristic is thus shopping for specialist items which the shopper wishes to keep discreet.

The above typology is partly informed by the results presented here, but has been developed also in response to the literature and wider reading regarding the changing and evolving nature of Internet shopping behaviours. The key point to note is the emphasis on *shopping experiences*, suggesting therefore that one individual may take on / adopt different 'styles' of shopping experience depending on the type of product they wish to purchase, the place that they make the purchase and so on. This is not to suggest that one Internet shopper will necessarily demonstrate all of these 'styles' or indeed that the five listed above are exhaustive. The typology is designed instead to show and suggest that Internet consumption is a fluid process, sometimes predictable but also on occasions surprising and less predictable. The characteristics of users are also significant, with some shoppers cautious about online shopping, for example, because of past online shopping experiences or a lack of knowledge / understanding about the Internet. These elements will be explored more fully in Chapter 5.

4.5 – Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter has analysed the results from the initial baseline survey which was administered to 100 Internet users. The results from the three sections of this survey have provided a valuable insight into the characteristics and behaviours of Internet users. In terms of consumer profiling, the most common group of Internet users surveyed here were professionals with high incomes (47%) and the majority of these households were couples with children (56%). This suggests Internet use is determined, to some degree at least, by socio-economic status. The second section

looked at general Internet use. From this, it was seen that respondents generally started using the Internet between 4 and 6 years ago, usually for work or educational reasons. Most can now access the Internet at home, spending over 10 hours per week for general information, web-based email and shopping – the latter accounting for 77% of users. This figure is significantly higher than past studies.

The final section of the analysis looked specifically at Internet shoppers. Based on these results, respondents mostly use the Internet to buy CDs and DVDs, shopping mainly via eBay and Amazon. They spend approximately 90 minutes per week shopping online with an annual average spend of £300. In terms of consumption practices, it thus seems that quite a few respondents use the Internet in similar ways – at least on a general level, suggesting a degree of standardisation / commercialisation rather than niche market consumer behaviour. This counters, to a degree, some of the current sociological and geographical literature on Internet shopping, which has tended to frame the medium as an ‘alternative’ consumption practice. While standardisation of consumption practices is a significant general pattern within the 100 respondents, the results have also helped to inform five ‘styles’ of Internet shopping experience, noted above. Chapter 5 will analyse the results from the Internet user biographies. This will provide a more detailed (qualitative) account of Internet use, informed by the Internet shopping typology outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 5

Internet User Biographies

5.1 - Introduction

The second phase of the data collection was an in-depth assessment of four respondents from the baseline survey. They were selected for this more detailed, qualitative analysis based on the answers provided in the questionnaire. In total, 18 Internet shoppers from the baseline sample were willing to be involved in phase two of the research. The answers given by the 18 respondents were cross-referenced and analysed to ensure that a range of Internet shoppers were chosen. This was based largely on the Internet shopping typology outlined in Chapter 4. The intention, therefore, was to study Internet users who exhibited one or more of the Internet shopping characteristics outlined in Chapter 4, taking account also of contrasting socio-demographic profiles. The user biographies will thus help to gain some more detailed insight into the typologies and their potential relevance in terms of understanding cultures of Internet consumption (Mansvelt; 2005), including a better understanding of the nature and motivations of Internet shoppers.

For the purposes of anonymity, each of the Internet users involved will be known only by their initials. These are IL, EW, MH & TH, and RO. This phase of the research was split into three sections (detailed in Chapter 3). To briefly re-cap, this involved completing an online survey, which included a number of interactive questions and links to popular shopping sites, an in-depth semi-structured interview and an online diary. From this phase, detailed information was collected on how and why people shop online, on issues users have whilst shopping online, as well as using the Internet more generally. The analysis also provides details of users past Internet shopping experiences.

The chapter is structured as follows. It begins by examining each of the four sets of respondents in turn to create their Internet user biography (see Cook et al.; 1998 for general guidelines on creating household biographies). After the four biographies, common themes will be identified and discussed in relation to Internet use and website design. The chapter ends with a short summary.

5.2 – Internet User Biography I: IL

IL is a 25 year old male who lives at home with his parents and sister in Coventry. He only uses the Internet at home. He has only recently had broadband installed at his home for the first time. He is a groundskeeper at a local sports venue and has an income of approximately £15,000 per year.

In terms of general Internet use, IL's range of online activities are not that varied, possibly because he has only had the Internet at home for two months. He mainly uses sites that aid his work. His current favourite website is www.pitchcare.com. This site is a specialist groundskeeper portal which provides a number of different resources. These include expert articles, a customisable long range weather forecast, job vacancies, a calendar of events, and a message board which creates a community feel. IL particularly likes the design of Pitchcare because it has a very clear layout, making it straightforward to use and easy to find information. As well as using the Internet for work based information, IL also uses web-based email and a range of sports based news sites. Despite only using the Internet for a relatively small number of things, IL particularly likes it because, as he puts it, "everything you want is at your fingertips" (IL, 22/05/07).

One other activity IL uses the Internet for is shopping. Regardless of the fact that he has not been using the Internet for very long and that his range of sites are fairly limited in terms of general use, he is a fairly frequent online shopper, buying or browsing on a weekly basis and spending approximately £30 per month. As with his general Internet use, IL only uses a specific range of sites to buy a narrow range of goods, which include sports equipment, CDs / DVDs / games, and electrical goods. All of these goods are perhaps stereotypical for his demographic profile. IL's favourite shop is www.play.com. This site specialises in CDs, DVDs and games and the main reasons that he uses this website are because it is very cheap, it is easy to use, it has a vast range of products and because he has ordered from the site before and so feels safe doing so again. When talking about other online shops he uses, IL stated that he tends to visit the sites of High Street stores that he would normally buy from anyway. He goes on to explain that being able to visit and purchase online was of greater convenience to him as he did not have to go to Coventry city centre to visit the stores and could "use it 24 hours a day...not limited to shop opening times" (IL, 22/05/07).

The details given by IL over the course of the survey and household interview were verified by the entries in his online shopping diary. In total, IL made four diary entries over the course of the two weeks, which amounted to two purchases and browsing on just two other instances. The two purchases made were DVDs from www.play.com and www.amazon.co.uk for a combined total of £33. In both purchase accounts he comments on having used the sites before and this made him feel safe and confident enough to be able to buy from them again. IL also makes reference to the fact that both purchases were on special offer. This was one of the key reasons why he purchased from the two websites. For the first browsing entry, IL was looking for a digital camera. For this purpose, he looked at www.pcworld.co.uk, www.comet.co.uk and www.currys.co.uk. All three websites are also major High Street stores. This is something he later commented on, saying that “they’re the stores that I know sell the products I’m interested in” (IL, 28/05/07). For the second browsing entry he was looking for golfing equipment. Once again his first port of call was the website for High Street store American Golf. Interestingly, once he had found some more information on the equipment he wanted he also looked on eBay – the second-hand auctioning website.

At first hand, IL demonstrates the traits of a ‘functional shopper’, using a fairly small range of sites to buy certain, mostly non-perishable goods, largely for convenience and also to save money. For the latter reason, he could also qualify as a ‘bargain shopper’. However, as the diary entry regarding the camera shows, IL will also, on occasions, use the Internet for more specialist purchases, although in some cases using certain sites as sources of information (based on knowledge of them as High Street stores) and then using that browsing information to identify bargains on, in this case, eBay. IL’s favourite shopping website, Play.com, is looked at in more detail below.

5.2.1 – Play.com

IL stated that he liked this website because it was clearly set out, used bright colours, and it felt like “they wanted you to be there” (IL, 22/05/07). This notion of a website creating a connection in this way is interesting, especially as the site is place to buy popular and readily available products at a lower price. Play.com specialises in CDs, DVDs and games but also sells a range of other goods including books, electronics and gadgets. A screenshot of the homepage can be seen in Figure 5.1 below.

Figure 5.1 – Screenshot of Play.com

5.3 – Internet User Biography II: EW

EW is a 25 year old female who lives in London. Her only access to the Internet is either work or via cybercafés. She works for the NHS and earns approximately £25,000 per year. EW's general Internet use is varied, possibly because she has been using the Internet regularly for almost 10 years. Online activities include: email; staying in touch with friends via social networking sites; finding new music; finding information on transport; banking; selling items through eBay; and some work based use. EW sees the Internet as extremely important in terms of helping her to maintain friendships because of the fact that she lives in a different city to most of her friends. Although she views the Internet as central to her lifestyle, she concedes that she could live without it; however, she believes that without this sense of 'connectedness' "it would make my life quite different to what it is now" (EW, 28/05/07).

EW's favourite website is www.facebook.com, which is one of the most popular free to use social networking sites that enable friends to keep in touch, regardless of where they are. As the site itself puts it, "Facebook is a social utility that connects you with the people around you". EW likes the layout and "modern design" of Facebook and prefers it to other social networking sites such as Myspace. Her favourite feature of Facebook is the unlimited space each user is given to upload photographs. These

photographs can then be shared between friends and those featured in each photograph can be “tagged” so that the picture shows up on their own profiles.

EW is a very frequent online “window shopper”, stating that she probably spends 80% of her time browsing for goods online as opposed to buying. Whilst frequently browsing for goods, EW is not a regular online purchaser or high spender, stating that she buys online approximately once every three months and only spends about £10 per month on the Internet. This could be explained in part by the fact that she does not completely trust the process of shopping online. EW has, as she remarked in the interview, “never bought anything whilst online in an Internet café because I don’t feel safe” (EW, 28/05/07). Instead, she prefers to browse for goods in the cybercafé and then if she wants to buy anything she will do so from a place where she feels safe entering her credit card details, such as the house of a friend or a member of the family.

As with her general online activities, EW is quite varied with what she would purchase online, including: clothes, CDs / DVDs, books, second-hand goods, concert tickets, travel tickets and holidays. In fact, the only items that EW states she would not obtain online is anything that is too high priced such as a car where she would not get the opportunity to see it with her own eyes or try it. EW’s favourite online store is www.eBay.co.uk, the auction site where Internet users can buy and sell goods with other Internet users. EW says that she particularly likes eBay because “its got everything and anything and it can be very cheap” (EW, 28/05/07). The range of items is an obvious draw for many to use eBay, but EW also states that she enjoys the exciting, interactive process of bidding for an item in an auction.

Over the course of the diary-keeping period, EW only made one entry to record an online purchase. In keeping with her answers to the online survey and in the interview, this purchase was made from her mother’s house because she “didn’t want to risk entering her credit card details on a computer in a cybercafé” (EW, 31/05/07). The purchase itself was a festival ticket priced at £135 from the specialised festival site www.womad.org. EW’s online shopping behaviours can thus again be understood and described in different ways. Overall, it is clear that the Internet is an important part of her lifestyle, especially through the use of social networking sites, but also seen through her enjoyment in Internet browsing, including quite a range of activities. In this case, whilst eBay is a site where “bargains can be found” and goods exchanged, the bidding process is also regarded with excitement.

5.3.1 – eBay.co.uk

As previously mentioned, www.eBay.co.uk was chosen by EW as her favourite online shopping site. The other three participants also stated that they had used this site. The site is an online auction site where users buy and sell items between themselves. As well as individuals selling items there are also a vast number of businesses that run online stores through eBay. The UK version of the site was launched in October 1999 and since that time it has grown into the number one e-commerce site in the UK. The corporate section of the site reports that, in terms of Internet use, 47% of Internet users visit the site at least once a month and that it takes up 11% of all the time Internet users spend online. It also notes that visitors to eBay.co.uk spend an average of two hours browsing the site and each view 266 pages per month. Over 68,000 people earn their primary or secondary income through eBay.

Figure 5.2 – Screenshot of eBay.co.uk

5.4 – Internet User Biography III: MH & TH

MH & TH were chosen for the second phase because they were a couple who both used the Internet for a range of activities. TH is a 42 year old female. MH is in his mid 40s and works as a security guard. TH works as a secretary. They have a 16 year

old son who lives with them. He was not involved in the research, but also uses the Internet for shopping. Together MH & TH have a combined household income in excess of £35,000 per year.

As briefly mentioned, MH & TH have an extremely diverse range of activities for which they use the Internet. As a couple, they both use the Internet to search for general information through search engines such as Google and Yahoo. They also use it to send and receive emails through their web-based mail client and to read the latest news. Individually, TH mainly uses the Internet to pursue her hobbies, one of which is arts and crafts where she gets many ideas and patterns from the web. MH uses the Internet mostly as a social networking tool. He is a member of an online forum, keeps a regular blog, has a myspace profile and shares his photographs and videos through www.flickr.com and www.youtube.com. In fact, MH & TH are such devotees to the Internet that when asked about what the Internet was good for they replied “what isn’t it good for?” (MH & TH, 07/06/07).

Out of the four household biographies, MH & TH spent the most amount of money on Internet shopping. They were also slightly different compared to the others because of the types of items they bought online. One of the main things MH & TH bought online was food. The main reason for doing their food shopping online was convenience. The couple do not own a car so normally if they wanted to visit a supermarket they would have to use public transport or rely on a member of the family. In the interview they explained how food shopping online enabled them to maintain their independence, as well as being convenient in terms of having their food delivered when it best suited them. MH & TH’s favourite (online) supermarket is Asda (www.asda.com). They have also, in the past, used Tesco’s online shopping facility (www.tesco.com), but said that they much preferred Asda after a bad experience using Tesco. They recalled this bad experience thus: “We had bought some bananas but Tesco did not have them in stock, so rather than cancelling the item or sending a higher priced pack of bananas they sent apples which doesn’t make any sense” (MH & TH, 07/06/07). They liked using Asda because if any products are out of stock they send the closest replacement they can. All replacements are verified with the customer when the shopping arrives and they have the option of sending the replacements back if they are not suitable. MH & TH also preferred Asda because all of the drivers are equipped with a portable credit card machine. This means that they can pay using their credit card upon delivery of the goods rather than online.

As well as food shopping, MH & TH also regularly purchase clothes and electrical products online. Their favourite site for purchasing clothes is a portal site called www.jdwilliams.co.uk. This site allows customers to have one single payment account that they can use on a number of different online retailers. Over the course of the survey period MH & TH made six separate diary entries, spending a total of £235. This was significantly higher than the other three households. All five of the purchases that they made were all in keeping with the types of products they initially said that they bought online in the household interview. The two main items were as follows. First, they spent £120 in one transaction through the JD Williams clothes site. They then spent £80 buying food from a specialist food retailer (www.keziefoods.co.uk). Kezie Foods sell specialised and 'alternative' meats from around the world, including, amongst other things, wild game, kangaroo meat, ostrich meat, crocodile meat, reindeer meat and game. MH & TH initially bought a taster pack from Kezie Foods after seeing the website advertised in a magazine. As they explained in their diary entries, they were so impressed with the products that they returned to the site to spend a further £60 a few days later.

MH & TH thus have a very interesting and diverse Internet user biography. As with the second biography, the Internet is now an important feature of their lifestyle and an everyday feature of their daily living and consumption practices. They also adopt different 'styles' of Internet shopping, using online supermarket shopping sites for convenience or specific sites for buying cloths, but also purchasing certain items from more specialist sites that sell, for example, 'exotic' meats and design patterns for arts and crafts.

5.4.1 – [Keziefoods.co.uk](http://www.keziefoods.co.uk)

[Keziefoods.co.uk](http://www.keziefoods.co.uk) was mentioned during the biography stage by MH & TH as one of their favourite online food shopping sites. Diary entries show that they spent £80 on the site during the two week long exercise. Kezie is a food wholesaler/retailer based in the Scottish Borders that specialises in alternative meats from across the World, including kangaroo, zebra, and crocodile. A screenshot of the Kezie Foods website can be seen in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3 – Screenshot of Keziefoods.co.uk

5.5 – Internet User Biography IV: RO

RO's profile and range of web experiences make her an interesting candidate for the second phase of the research. RO is a 33 year old female who lives with her partner, a 30 year old male, in her own home in Coventry. RO works as a solicitor and earns up to £35,000 per year. RO uses the Internet both at home and work. However, because she works long hours, the majority of her Internet use takes place while she is at work. For this reason, the interview with RO was conducted in her work place so that a better understanding of her normal Internet encounters could be gained.

In terms of general Internet use, RO is quite a conservative user. She uses online banking facilities, a court services website for work, a site which lists fixtures for the hockey team she plays for, and Google for general information and browsing. Her two favourite websites are news.bbc.co.uk and news.sky.com. RO particularly likes these sites because she believes that they encapsulate everything that is good about the Internet by giving you, as she remarked, “free, up to the minute news and information” (RO, 21/06/07). In fact, these two sites have become such an integral part of her day-to-day working experience that she does not buy newspapers anymore, preferring instead to “just read it online” (RO, 21/06/07).

RO's online shopping characteristics are slightly different to the other three participants in this biographical phase of the study. She spends relatively little time

browsing for products. She explains her online browsing / shopping patterns thus: “I tend to use the Internet because I know there’s something I want to buy” (RO, 21/06/07). Part of the reason for this may be because she mainly accesses the Internet from work and whilst there are no restrictions on her Internet usage, she is generally too busy to spend significant amounts of time browsing for goods. RO says that rather than only buying certain types of goods from the Internet she often checks online for most items that she knows she wants to buy. Her favourite website is www.eBay.co.uk, which she enjoys for the vast range of goods that can be purchased from the site. RO is a keen hockey player and states that eBay is particularly good for fancy dress outfits and accessories that she has to buy for her club’s social events. As well as using eBay, RO also buys a lot of her clothing online from High Street retailers and also purchases books, CDs and DVDs from Tesco Jersey. This is a Channel Islands site, so goods are tax exempt.

From the information given in RO’s diary entries, it can be seen that, in line with her previous answers, she tends to be someone who makes relatively expensive purchases of goods that she already knows she wants to buy. Over the survey period, RO made two entries, totalling £135. The first entry was for a dress for a hen weekend. Because she knew the type of dress she was looking for she only spent 10 minutes from start to finish browsing and purchasing. The second entry was along similar lines. RO had seen a pair of shoes she wanted to buy on the High Street but they had sold out of her size. She therefore logged on to the Next website (www.next.com) and made the purchase from there rather than via their High Street store.

RO’s overall Internet user profile is thus largely functional, a useful source of information for work and leisure purposes and a place to buy products efficiently and which otherwise might be difficult to source via more conventional retail channels.

5.5.1 – Next.co.uk

Next.co.uk was chosen by RO as one of her favourite sites during the diary entry stage. During the diary exercise, RO spent £40 on a pair of shoes at this site. Next is a major clothing retailer with 460 stores on the High Street. They also have a major home shopping sector, including a catalogue and website. The corporate area of the Next website states that in the first half of 2007 the home shopping arm of the

business accounted for 40% of their total profits (£73.8m). A screenshot of Next's homepage can be seen below in Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4 – Screenshot of Next.co.uk

5.6 – Comparative Analysis of Internet User Biographies

A number of common themes can be drawn out from the Internet user biographies. These themes were selected because they stood out as being significant to all or the majority of respondents in terms of Internet shopping practices, motivations, and/or experiences. The themes were generated through a comparative analysis of the four user case studies. Five themes will be discussed below and are concerned respectively with: online safety and security; the social role of the Internet; the eBay phenomenon; consumer practices in terms of Internet browsing and purchasing; and website design and layout. Table 5.1 shows how the four households relate to each theme.

Table 5.1 – Common Themes by Internet User Biography

	IL	EW	MH & TH	RO
Online Safety and Security	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
The Social Role of the Internet	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
The eBay Phenomenon	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Browsing and Purchasing	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Website Design and Layout	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

5.6.1 – Online Safety and Security

When discussing Internet shopping practices with the different Internet users, one of the biggest issues raised by all participants was safety and security when purchasing goods online. IL and MH & TH, for example, both said that they took particular care to make sure that each site that they used for shopping was a secure site. In fact, whilst being observed using www.play.com (his favourite website for shopping), IL went as far as saying that he only purchased goods from websites that carry a VeriSign security certificate (Figure 5.5.). VeriSign is a company that offers Secure Socket Layer (SSL) Certificates to websites, including online retailers, where sensitive personal data is being transmitted between two parties over the Internet. In terms of online shopping, this software encrypts the buyer's credit card and personal details whilst they are sent to the retailer for purchasing.

Figure 5.5 – The VeriSign Logo

Credit card and personal details falling into the wrong hands was also something EW was concerned about. As mentioned in her biography, she only has access to the Internet in cybercafés and would not buy anything while using a computer in one of these places because of security concerns. Her cautious approach to protecting her personal details is understandable, as earlier in the year RO's credit card details were used to make a fraudulent purchase of an airline ticket to Ireland. Her bank has since informed her that her details were stolen when she made a purchase online.

Another area of concern participants highlighted when it came to the Internet and safety was the issue of paedophilia and the dangers the Internet can pose to young people and children. Although this issue is a wider online concern not associated with

shopping (see Bingham et al; 1999), all four users raised the issue as a point for discussion.

5.6.2 – The Social Role of the Internet

Another popular subject when discussing general Internet use was the role the Internet plays in modern society in general and more specifically in respondents' own everyday lives, particularly in terms of socialising. In a number of user biographies, it was clear also that the Internet is regularly used as a source for free information. Whilst users did not directly relate these experiences to online shopping, they clearly have a wider role in terms of understanding online habits and behaviours and in some cases may also impact upon shopping behaviours. EW, for example, stated that the Internet played a key role in terms of helping her to stay in touch with distant friends. This is done mainly through Facebook, a site also regularly used by IL. MH & TH also use the Internet as a social device, in their case via Myspace, blogs and other chat room forums and discussion groups. The trends described here are similar to the wider patterns described in Chapter 4 and mirror recent newspaper reports which note the increasing significance of social networking sites in people's lives and particularly online experiences. In July 2007, Myspace, for example, was reported to have over 10 million users from the UK (www.telegraph.co.uk), each of which had their own page with information about themselves.

While social networking sites can have a positive influence on users' lives and relationships, the Internet can also have a detrimental impact on users. Internet addiction is an increasingly common problem across the world. The Centre for Internet Addiction Recovery (www.netaddiction.com) estimates, for instance, that between 5 and 10% of the population is currently addicted to the Internet, which includes such things as "eBay addiction". This issue was also discussed by Bing (2005) in relation to online shopping and auction sites. When comparing Internet biography notes taken for this study, the issue of addiction does not figure prominently across the sample. However, the issue was raised in the biographies provided by MH & TH. Although they used the Internet very regularly, the example provided was of a friend. They described the example as follows: "We have a friend who came to see us yesterday and had he not had his laptop with him he would have gone home an hour earlier. He couldn't have an evening without going on the Internet; he's addicted. It kills his social life, he's up all night until 4am and he has no social life" (MH & TH, 07/06/07). While none of the people involved in this study could

be classed as addicts, they did all comment that they would not want to live without the Internet, which at least suggests increasing co-dependence, whether as a source of information, communication and/or e-commerce.

5.6.3 – The eBay Phenomenon

Each of the four participants in phase two of the research had some experience of using eBay. In fact, both EW and RO picked eBay as their favourite online shopping site and both commented on the vast range of goods that were available there. This particular website is a significant feature in many of the Internet users' diary entries. IL, for example, browsed eBay whilst shopping for some golf equipment during his diary-keeping. In fact, all of the participants are registered eBay users. This is perhaps not surprising, considering that there are currently 233 million users worldwide, with over 15 million of these based in the UK (www.eBay.co.uk; accessed 03/02/08). In the household interviews many recalled the excitement the site creates in terms of searching for bargains, as well as the excitement the bidding process helps to create (see also Bing; 2005). In these examples at least, it seems that the eBay phenomenon is as much about the process of finding a bargain than it is about the actual purchase of the product itself or even its commercial value. This supports the earlier points above which emphasised the important social and cultural roles that the Internet plays, extending beyond a simple economic exchange between a buyer and seller.

Although regular eBay users, the participants also expressed some degree of caution with regards to the safety of eBay. RO, for example, stated that she would "limit purchases to £50 an item because of trust issues" (RO, 21/06/07). EW meanwhile would not buy any very high priced goods that, as she put it, "I couldn't see with my own eyes" (EW, 28/05/07). MH & TH do not currently use eBay and are not even sure they would do so again because of a bad experience. In their case, they had purchased something that was to be sent recorded delivery but it never arrived. After various emails to the seller they started proceedings through the PayPal payment branch of eBay to recover their money. They also left negative feedback about the seller who subsequently sent them threatening emails. They explained how they eventually got their money back through eBay and the seller was banned from the site. Understandably they are now reluctant to use eBay again. This example usefully supports the earlier comments about security and safety.

5.6.4 – Browsing and Purchasing

A significant aspect of this project has been to explore the relationship between browsing and purchasing, following earlier contributions by Smith and Shivakumar (2004). Throughout the course of phase two a number of interesting consumer related trends became apparent. These trends were slight habits or characteristics that people had picked up while shopping online, but rather than being individual traits they appeared in the majority of participants. The first of these trends is the amount of time users spent “window shopping” online as opposed to actually purchasing. The majority of participants (bar RO) claimed that they spent upwards of 80% of their online shopping time merely browsing for goods that they could or might buy, rather than having a specific item in mind that they needed to buy. This was true for even some who in other entries represented functional shopping behaviours. One reason for this could be that, unlike the High Street, there are a vast number of online sites which can make finding the cheapest item an even more difficult and time consuming process. Another reason would appear to be the ease with which users can “window shop” online; they do not need to leave the confines of their own home and can browse the Internet 24 hours a day. Browsing may also, as Smith and Shivakumar (2004) note in their work, be an enjoyable and relaxing experience, not always resulting in or requiring a purchase of goods.

Related to this latter trend is something that MH & TH and IL suggested about the Internet. Both case studies referred to the Internet as a very useful resource for investigating new purchases and researching a range of products on the market. One of IL’s diary entries, for instance, talks about how he had used the Internet to browse a number of different sites for golfing equipment. Significantly, he had not purchased the equipment online, as it was reasonably expensive and he would prefer to see the products and handle them before buying anything. MH & TH recall similar experiences for some items they eventually purchased on the High Street. The biographies reveal then an interesting link between the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’, especially for more expensive goods such as electrical products. The Internet is thus an extended service to browse goods to gain initial information about them. Conversely, as RO’s account of her purchase at Next shows shoppers may sometimes use the Internet to buy goods that are not available in their local High Street.

A final trend that was observed in relation to browsing and Internet purchasing was the notion of familiarity and loyalty. RO, for example, explained how she no longer uses www.amazon.co.uk regularly because she is not as familiar with the site as she is with others that sell the same items. In fact, she suggested that even if it was cheaper on Amazon she would probably purchase the item from a different store. This comment was echoed by IL when comparing www.play.com and www.cd-wow.com which both sell CDs / DVDs / games. As he put it: "If it was a pound cheaper than play.com I'd still use play.com. I trust them. I've used them before and they haven't let me down so why should I stray now. For a pound I would stay, but if it was £5 or £10 I would obviously use the cheaper site, but its never going to be that different for a CD or DVD really" (IL, 22/06/07). Trust and loyalty are therefore important features of online shopping, as they are in conventional economic transactions (see Wrigley and Lowe; 2002, Hudson; 2005). This also suggests that if sites can attract customers in the first place they are more inclined to stay loyal to the store if they receive good service and like the design and layout of the site. This loyalty can also be enhanced through the use of direct marketing emails. After making a purchase many retailers, including Amazon and eBay, will send out periodical emails which link to their sites and may suggest items the customer would be interested in or special offers.

5.6.5 – Website Design and Layout

As part of the online survey, participants were asked to visit six sites. These were grouped in sets of two similar type sites (see Appendix 2 for questions). The sites selected were two online auction sites, two online book retailers, and two online food sites. After browsing the site for a few minutes, respondents were asked to pick which one in each of the categories was their favourite. They were then asked to explain why it was their favourite of the two and to highlight what they particularly liked about the layout and design of the site. The primary objective of this part of the online survey was to get some kind of idea about what respondents looked for in a website, including some of the prompts that encouraged them to buy a particular item. The exercise was also designed as a fun thing to do, before respondents were asked later in the survey more in-depth questions about their Internet shopping behaviours.

Each of the three types of sites included a large, well-known online shopping site and a lesser known shopping site. For the auction sites, all four chose eBay and all four

gave the same reasons as to why they liked it the best. The main points noted were that it looked professional, used bright colours, and was clear, straightforward and easy to navigate. They all also mentioned that being regular users of eBay they were familiar with the site and trusted it. For the book sites, three users selected Amazon, with the one person who picked www.bookgiant.com commenting that it “looked nice and showed the books well” (MH & TH, 30/05/07). Those that picked Amazon said that they did so because it had a variety of books and other items, was clearly designed, logical, and familiar. For the food sites, two selected Tesco and two the Good Food Network (www.thegoodfoodnetwork.co.uk). This was surprising, as the Good Food Network was initially included as a contrast to the Tesco website because of its poor design. Those that chose Tesco said they did so because it was clear, easy to navigate, used big fonts, and was familiar. Those that picked the Good Food Network said that they did so because it looked interesting. They also noted that it had a variety of items to purchase, was “something a bit different” and was clearly set out. In most cases, users tended to favour sites that were familiar, although the Good Food Network example provides a useful contrast between familiarity versus offering users something different – in this case food.

This exercise, in addition to the information respondents gave about the layout and design of their favourite shopping sites, provides understanding of what Internet users look for in terms of website design. It is possible to pick out four main characteristics. First, users look for clarity in a website, which includes the clarity of font, images and links. Secondly, respondents identify “ease of navigation” as important. Users appear to prefer a website that is easy to navigate around. This is not surprising. Thirdly, people appear to like / favour bright colours. This stimulates them and seems to make them feel happy to be using the site. Finally, users like a website to have a familiar feel to it. It does not, however, appear to matter whether they have purchased anything from the site in the past as long as it feels familiar, friendly and inviting.

5.7 – The Relationship Between Virtual and Real Spaces

The four Internet user biographies have highlighted important links that exist in many aspects between users ‘virtual’ and ‘real’ worlds. These links exist in terms of general Internet use and more importantly for this project in how consumers use the Internet for shopping practices. Various points of connection can be noted here.

The first point where real and virtual worlds connect is the actual location where users access the Internet. Interestingly, this was different for all four of the participants and looking at each of them in turn it gives some insight into how their physical location may affect their use and experiences online. IL, for example, accesses the Internet from his home using a shared, family computer in a communal space. This influences the types of experiences he can have online and the types of goods he can purchase online. MH & TH, in contrast, access the Internet in their own homes through personal desktop and laptop computers. These potentially discreet shopping practices are not available to IL. EW only has access to the Internet through cybercafés which appears to limit the goods that she can buy. EW stated, for instance, that she would not purchase anything using a credit card in a cybercafe as she does not have enough trust in the security of their machines or networks. RO accesses the Internet primarily from her workplace. While there are no limitations to the amount of time or sites she can visit while there, it is possible from her mainly functional style of online shopping that it may have a self-regulatory effect on her and limit her experience in that way.

In terms of shopping, the link between the real and the virtual can be seen in three ways via the user biographies. Firstly, the Internet is seen, particularly by IL, as a place where he can research purchases before going to a high street store to buy them, as was evident when he spent time browsing for golf equipment online before going into the store and purchasing it in person. Conversely it is also true that users may research the products on the high street, going into stores where they can see, touch and/or try the goods before then purchasing them online to take advantage of cheaper prices or if the item was not available on-line. Secondly, it is clear that rather than the Internet being an alternative space for consumption, as much of the literature suggests, it is actually now becoming more of an extension of the high street. Many of the shops which the participants purchased from or browsed are popular mainstream retailers, with a large number of stores throughout the UK. MH & TH, for example, did their food shopping online with ASDA, the second biggest UK grocer, while RO shopped at Next, one of the UK's biggest clothing retailers. Brand recognition is also an important factor for high street retailers with an online presence. In relation to this, IL stated that when looking for a piece of electrical equipment online he first went to the stores that he knew well (e.g. Comet, Currys and PC World). Finally, pure online retailers such as eBay and Amazon are following in the footsteps of large multiple high street retailers by amassing market share and making themselves the most popular retailers on the web. These outlets thus

represent online forms of mass consumerism. This type of shopping experience and consumption practice is some way removed from early writings on the Internet, which tends to espouse a sense of 'alternativeness' when describing the type of shopping experience the Internet offers. What is different though is that shoppers are buying goods via Amazon or eBay through a retail format that appears more individualised and completes transactions in different, more personalised ways in the sense that customers have online accounts, customer recommendations, etc. In this and other ways (e.g. the way shoppers rate suppliers), the Internet does provide different consumption practices, even if those practices and products are becoming increasingly common and more popular.

Following on from the common themes previously outlined, social networks also have an inter-connectedness between the real and virtual. These sites, as well as other forms of communication available in cyberspace (e.g. email, web-based phone calls, webcams, instant messaging chat), allow users to talk to friends and family without being in the same location. This was specifically mentioned by EW who uses such tools to keep in touch with her real life friends who live in different cities or countries and is key in helping her to maintain personal relationships with these people.

5.8 – Chapter Summary

This chapter has looked at information collected for four Internet users. The discussion has focused on Internet user's profile characteristics and their habits and experiences when using the Internet to browse and buy goods. The four users each have their own ways of experiencing and using the Internet as a medium for shopping. All purchase different types of goods from specific sites (although some of the sites are the same or similar) and spend different amounts of money on online purchases. By way of summary, each of the respondents will be discussed briefly in relation to the shopping typologies outlined at the end of Chapter 4. Each user falls mainly into one or two specific shopping categories or styles (Fish et al 2003). However, as stated in Chapter 4 and earlier in this chapter, users often have more than one distinct style of Internet shopping behaviour. The users can be described thus:

- *IL: functional / specialist Internet shopping styles.* IL was new to the Internet and as such was not an overly frequent or adventurous online shopper, using a small range of sites and limiting himself mainly to CDs and DVDs. For this

reason, his main style of shopping was 'functional', with the Internet a tool of convenience and a mechanism to save money for certain generic items. He does, however, on occasions, use the Internet for more specialist items such as a camera or golf equipment.

- *EW: bargain / lifestyle shopping styles.* EW was unique as she only had access to the Internet from cybercafés. This limited her online shopping experience as she did not trust the location enough to buy goods using their computers. Her online shopping behaviours, in terms of goods purchased and where from – mostly eBay – suggest this is someone who shops for bargains. However, when this is set in a wider context, the Internet is an important lifestyle asset, as someone who enjoys the process of bidding and also uses the Internet frequently as a site for social networking as much as buying goods.
- *MH & TH: lifestyle / functional / specialist shopping styles.* MH & TH were the boldest Internet shoppers and also spent the largest amount of money online. They bought a variety of goods from a range of sites, with the Internet a key part of their daily lives, including functional purchases such as food and more specialist items. They represent a range of styles.
- *RO: functional shopping style.* The final user (RO) mainly accessed the Internet from work and this reduced the amount of browsing she did before buying goods. She was perhaps the most efficient / functional online shopper and tended to only buy goods when there was something she definitely wanted to buy rather than acting on impulse.

What is significant here is that in none of the examples did the surveys uncover more 'discreet shopping' behaviours. Despite all having their individual profiles, a number of common issues regarding the Internet arose. All were worried, for example, about the safety of their personal and credit card details when buying goods online. All also acknowledged the social role that the Internet now plays in modern life. The most common website used by the participants was eBay and this reflects in part the wider argument running through this thesis which is that some consumption practices when it comes to the Internet are quite standardised, even though experiences may be different and individually stylised. The next chapter will draw together the empirical information set out in this chapter and the baseline chapter to provide a more comprehensive discussion and overall conclusion.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

The preceding five chapters of the thesis have presented the write up for this study, which can be divided into two distinct sections. The first section provided the contextual and methodological framework for the study, which comprised: a brief introduction to the study in Chapter 1; a review of existing academic literature in Chapter 2; and an outline of the research methodology in Chapter 3. The second section provided the empirical analysis consisting of: an analysis of the baseline survey results in Chapter 4; the analysis of the Internet user biographies in Chapter 5.

This final chapter starts out by rehearsing the main contextual elements of the study, before moving on to outline how the objectives in Chapter 1, have been achieved. The methodology is then evaluated, taking into account the conceptual and methodological frameworks employed and outlining problems encountered through the process, as well as suggesting possible avenues for future research. The chapter ends with a summary of the projects main findings and overall argument.

6.1 – Contextual Background of the Study

Online retailing is taking, and is set to continue to take, an ever increasing role in consumers' shopping habits. In addition to this, it is also a topic of growing interest to human geographers and other social scientists. It was suggested in Chapter 2 that much of the previous academic work in this area had tended to concentrate on the Internet itself, including its role as a tool that enabled producers/sellers to sell goods, as well as broader interrogations of the meaning of cyberspace and the implications this had for understanding relationships between people and place. As summarized in Table 2.1, this thesis argued that limited research had so far combined consumption, retail and cyberspace. This highlighted the need for a study of this nature which specifically looks at the combination of these areas, particularly the influences that online retailing has on consumer shopping behaviour and 'cultures of consumption'. The primary focus of the research has been the consumer and their behaviours and motivations when shopping online. The following section will look at the key findings from the research relating them back to the original objectives.

6.2 – Key Findings in Relation to the Objectives

In Chapter 1, three objectives were set out for the study. The previous two empirical chapters have discussed the results from each of the stages of the data collection. The following will look at each of the objectives in turn and discuss how these were achieved through the course of the research.

6.2.1 – Objective 1

The first objective was:

“To explore how people become involved with the Internet and technology for shopping, and the extent to which this is part of people’s everyday lives”.

The first part of this objective, which looked at how users initially become involved with the Internet, was primarily achieved through the baseline survey where 100 users were asked the main reasons for first using the Internet. The results were presented in Table 4.3. Very few users’ stated that they started using the Internet for shopping (2%), with people more commonly using it for education (31%) or work (19%) purposes. However, 64% of people surveyed stated that they did use the Internet for shopping. This revealed that even if users did not initially turn to the Internet as a mechanism to buy goods, it became for many one of its uses as familiarity and confidence grew.

Throughout the course of the study it was extremely evident that for a vast number of people the Internet is now part of their everyday lives. Specifically, it was observed that online shopping was also becoming an increasing part of users’ routines, with the majority of respondents falling into the high frequency online shopper band, defined here as daily, weekly or fortnightly purchasers. In terms of other Internet uses, social networking sites were also seen to play an increasing role in users’ everyday online lives. The social role the Internet plays in users’ lives and shopping experiences was an unforeseen outcome, in that the project was largely intending to explore online consumer purchasing patterns and behaviour. While it was acknowledged that the Internet was a space for community, interaction and sociability, it was not expected that it had such an impact on users’ lives. One explanation as to why this was observed so markedly during this research may be the overall rise of these types of social networking sites over the course of the

research. At the beginning of the project, MySpace was still in its infancy and Facebook only became available to the general public midway through the study. Although tentative, the large scale survey and more intensive Internet user biographies have potentially glimpsed at another important phase in the Internet revolution – the rise of social networking sites.

6.2.2 – Objective II

The second objective was:

“To appreciate the different aspects of Internet shopping behaviour displayed by individuals, and to understand the mechanisms that cause individuals to buy certain products from certain electronic retailers”.

Online shopping behaviours and the factors that influence them were drawn out during the two empirical stages of this thesis presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 of the study. The primary online shopping behaviour that stood out during the consumer biographies stage was the ways in which people browsed for goods online as part of the buying process. The majority of households said that they spent a lot longer browsing for goods online as opposed to actually buying them, an observation also supported by the baseline survey results. The questionnaires in Chapter 4 showed that on average respondents spent 90 minutes per week shopping online. Considering actual transactions online only take a matter of minutes and the majority of users (27%) only purchased goods once per month, it can be assumed that much of this 90 minutes is spent “window shopping”, a trend also noted by Smith and Shivakumar (2004).

One issue that was raised by the biographies but that is more difficult to pick out from the format of the baseline survey is the affect that design and layout of websites can have on a user's behaviour. It was seen that users were much more likely to purchase from an online retailer if their website was clear, bright, easy to navigate, and had a familiar feel. It would appear that retailers design and market their web stores in a way that is similar to High Street stores would market their goods in their actual stores. This reinforces the argument about websites essentially acting as extensions of the High Street, particularly for well known stores that effectively use and design their site to act exactly in this way. The intention, it seems, is to create sites in this way so that consumers respond more favourably towards them in the

sense that feel somehow more familiar. Obvious parallels can be drawn here for retailers that have both online and High Street stores (e.g. Next). Companies that are solely online retailers, such as Amazon and eBay, are less aligned to this argument, although they do adopt interesting ways of both presenting their goods and crucially building consumer trust, familiarity and loyalty, including requests to rate sellers, building up individual buyer portfolios and recommendations and so on.

Trust when shopping online was a further influence for behaviour online that was highlighted by most people surveyed during the research. All four biographies talked about security and safety as issues of primary concern when purchasing goods online. In extreme cases, baseline survey respondents highlighted safety online as the main reason why they did not and would not purchase from online retailers. In total, 25% of people who did not shop online stated that they did not do so because of safety issues and/or because they could not see what they were buying. One respondent stated that he did not shop online because of a bad experience in the past and no longer trusted using his credit card on the Internet. This was similar to two households in the biographies who had also had bad experiences when shopping online. While these users had not taken such lengths as to stop shopping online altogether, they were more wary of which websites they used.

As a way to understand online shopping, the thesis has identified five Internet shopping styles (following Fish et al; 2003): functional Internet shopping; bargain Internet shopping; lifestyle Internet shopping; specialised Internet shopping; and discreet Internet shopping. An important argument that emerges from the results is the suggestion that users can exhibit different shopping behaviours at different times. Moreover, the list of shopping types is by no means exhaustive. This leads to the overall conclusion that, in terms of behaviour characteristics, online shoppers can change their behaviour dependent on the type of shopping that they are doing and where they are making those purchases from. Internet cultures of consumption are therefore fluid categories that must not be confined by rigid/static typologies (Smith and Shivakumar; 2004), a point reinforced in the biography stage where three of the four Internet users demonstrated more than one shopping style.

6.2.3 – Objective III

The third objective was:

“To investigate the relationship between real and virtual shopping spaces”.

This objective was mainly achieved as part of the consumer biography stage in Chapter Five. However, some of the results from the baseline survey in Chapter Four also emphasise the linkage between virtual and real shopping spaces. Much of the literature surrounding e-tailing, as reviewed in Chapter Two, presents online retailing as an alternative consumption space, where shopping practices take place that are largely separate from the high street. The results of this study suggest that a somewhat different retailing landscape may be developing. It might be expected that with the lower overhead costs associated with e-commerce, that more independent and diverse retailers would thrive online. However, it can be seen from the results of the baseline survey presented in Chapter 4 that the majority of websites mentioned by respondents were either large high street retailers or large online retailers, such as Amazon and eBay. It seems that much the same as in the real, mainstream retail economy, that larger retailer sites have become increasingly popular with consumers and in turn have seen increased growth and market power. As such, this indicates that the Internet is just as likely to experience and encourage mass consumerism as the high street, contesting to some extent earlier arguments about the Internet as a mechanism for ‘alternative capitalism’ (Hudson; 2005). This does not deny, of course, the possibility that these alternative practices still remain and it is in fact also evident in the sample but to a lesser degree. It is also the case that users prefer to use stores that have strong brand recognition, as noted in Chapter Four where 65% of the commonly listed websites that were all popular high street retailers. This adds to the argument that high street retailers are using their web stores as a means to extend their activities and market coverage. This is particularly the case for certain grocery retailers such as ASDA and Tesco (see Murphy, 2007).

The virtual and real retail spaces can also link and relate to shoppers behaviour in “different” types of environment. The shopping typologies identified in Chapter Four highlight this in different ways. Firstly, the existence and identification of five different types of on-line shopping experience suggests that the Internet is no longer just a place for alternative and specialist forms of shopping. Further, a number of these shopping types, particularly functional, bargain and lifestyle shopping styles, are in a

lot of cases mirror images of the shopping behaviours and experiences that are available on the high street (see Chapter Four).

As part of the browsing process, many of the participants in the biography stage stated the importance they place in spending time researching purchases online. Interestingly, in some cases this product-based research resulted in the purchase being made on the high street rather than online. This was particularly the case for more expensive goods where there was a feeling of seeing and/or trying before you buy. This shows an important link in the case of consumer purchasing between the “real” and “virtual” retail locations. It is most evident in the user biographies and can work both ways, in that one user also identified goods on the high street but then bought them via the Internet because of better price, convenience and availability. The relationship between the real and virtual is also supported by the baseline survey results in that a number of respondents explained how they used the Internet to find out information about goods / potential purchases.

6.3 – Evaluation of Methodology and Suggestions for Future Research

Overall the mixed method approach used to undertake this study has gone some way towards further developing the knowledge of online retailing from a geographical point of view, as well as informing the wider subject areas of consumption, retailing and cyberspace. The reasons for people first becoming involved with the Internet, their online shopping behaviours and influences, and a critical evaluation of seller websites have been drawn out using a combination of extensive and intensive approaches.

A number of strengths of the methods employed can be noted here. First, the use of the Internet as a device to study itself, particularly through the online survey and partly through the shadowing, gives particular credibility to the research. It highlights the potential of the Internet as a research tool. Secondly, the mix of quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques gave the opportunity to build upon each stage of the data collection process and enabled the research to get closer to Internet users and to begin to unpack the complex nature of consumer shopping behaviours. Finally, by engaging intensively with consumers through the biography stage it was possible to gain a valuable insight into their actions and how these can be influenced by their online experiences.

As with the majority of studies, there were some areas that could have been improved upon and some problems that were encountered along the way. Recruitment for both stages, particularly the initial baseline survey, was especially difficult. Many people were disinclined to stop and answer the questionnaire. In addition to this, there were a small number of questions in the baseline survey that were not as informative as they perhaps could have been, despite a pilot exercise. A further problem identified through the course of the study was the fact that it was difficult to obtain information on everything that users were using the Internet to shop for. These “discreet” shopping experiences, by their very nature, tend to include the purchase of goods that users would rather keep private or are embarrassed about. It is possible that these shopping experiences account for a significant amount of online retailing.

In light of this evaluation of the methodology, it is possible to make a number of recommendations for the direction of future studies. First, with more time and resources it would be possible for researchers to increase the sample size at both stages of the research to get a more generalised view of consumer behaviours when shopping online. In the biography stages, users could be followed for longer and at different stages of their Internet “careers”. This would provide a useful in-depth analysis of a larger sample of users. Linked to this is the possibility of implementing a more complex baseline survey, perhaps changing the method of data collection to a telephone survey. A telephone survey would make recruitment quicker and potentially make users more likely to divulge discreet shopping habits than face-to-face surveys. The use of more technological methods in the shadowing stage could be a further possibility. This could be done by software that logs and follows users online shopping and browsing habits. Whilst this has potential, it must be recognised that some people may still be unwilling to take part because of trust/security issues. Another way to overcome this barrier may be to introduce further ethnographic-based methodologies, a technique currently favoured by Don Slater in a project that is examining pornography and the Internet. A number of studies have either focused on the consumer or the seller/producer, neglecting potentially fruitful investigations into specific links that exist between the two. Whilst it would be challenging to recruit retailers who were willing to talk openly about the methods they use to design their websites, it is clear that future research needs to take account of and examine the nature of relations between consumers and sellers/producers.

In terms of different topics related to e-tailing that could be investigated, it is clear that social networking and its influence/impact on online shopping is an area in which more research needs to be undertaken. During the course of this study the importance of social networking sites such as Myspace and Facebook have become apparent, a consequence of subsequent online developments. Social networking was not the focus of this project, but it is clear that they may have some impact on online shopping, as alluded to by some users during the biography stage of the fieldwork. Clearly more work on social networking, including potential links with on-line shopping, is urgently needed.

6.4 – Final Conclusion

The overall research aim for this project was:

“To critically explore the nature of UK online retailing, especially its influence on consumer shopping behaviours and the link between ‘real’ and virtual space”.

This was achieved through the realization of the three objectives, as discussed previously. Overall, a number of factors were seen to influence consumer shopping behaviours and so-called “cultures of consumption”. Among these, key factors included understanding how safe users feel when shopping online, how much they trust retailers and how loyal they feel towards certain sites. The results of the study have successfully developed the original literature on e-tailing and geographies of consumption, including providing some new directions for future study. Firstly, this study of Internet shopping suggests that quite practical features seem to drive why consumers used the Internet – especially ease and affordability. They are also drawn towards quite commercial, popular sites like eBay and Amazon. The findings thus reveal consumption practices that are in fact quite similar, on a very general level, contesting past readings that have suggested that the Internet facilitates a re-localisation of food consumption (Holloway; 2002). However, it is equally shown that one shopper can use the Internet in different ways. This is the key contribution made to the literature on Internet shopping and cyberspace.

Secondly, this project – using the shopping typology – helps to further recognise the complex nature of modern day consumerism. Just as we know there is really no such thing as a stereotypical organic consumer, for example, even though they are often

labelled as 'alternative' or 'green', we see here the multiple forms of Internet consumers, as consumers – and sometimes the same consumer – negotiate different practical and ideological considerations when using the Internet to browse and buy goods. So the thesis further supports work in geographies of consumption that contest attempts that often stereotype certain types of consumption practice (see Mansvelt; 2005).

Thirdly, a popular debate in human geography about the contrast between 'alternative' and 'conventional' forms of economic practice has been further illustrated in this thesis. As in studies of things like car boot sales and farmers' markets, it is clear here also that conceptual distinctions between these categories do not always stack up in practice. A further dualism that is contested here is obviously the 'real' and the 'virtual'. The project thus adds to various pieces of work across human geography that have attempted to break down binaries and started to reveal more hybridised ways of living and being (see Whatmore; 2002 – Hybrid Geographies).

Above all, the analysis has shown that the Internet has become more of an extension of the high street, displaying the same types of mass consumerism exhibited in the "real" world, although mediated through different seller mediums and conveying what appears to be more individualised consumption practices and exchanges. A number of types of shopping experience were identified and confirmed by the empirical research. An additional key direction for future research is social networking, currently seen to be extremely important to Internet users. This phenomenon appears to have a significant influence on users' general Internet behaviours, including online shopping.

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APPENDIX 1

**BASELINE SURVEY
QUESTIONNAIRE AND
SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS**

CONSENT FORM

Title of project:

Spaces of virtual consumption: the geography of Internet shopping

Name of Researcher:

Adam Smith

- I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 1/11/06 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected.
- I understand that relevant sections of any data collected during the study, may be looked at by responsible individuals from Coventry University, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.
- I agree to take part in the above study.

☐☐☐☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Person Taking Consent
(if different from researcher)

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

ONLINE RETAILING
CONSUMER SURVEY



- **Do you use the Internet?**

Yes

No (End of Survey)

INTERNET USE

2 Where do you primarily use the Internet?

Home

Work

Library

Other – Please Specify _____

3. What do you use the Internet for? And for how long per week? Please answer all that apply.

OPTION

Web-based email

General Information

Study

Games

Shopping

Selling goods

Discussion forums / Chat rooms

Online gambling

Other – Please Specify

TIME PER WEEK (hrs/mins)

How long have you been using the Internet?

Less than 1 year

1-3 years

4-6 years

7-10 years

10+ years

5. Why did you start using the Internet?

ONLINE RETAILING

6. Do you use the Internet to buy products?

Yes

No

6a. If no, why not? (Go to profile questions)

6b. If yes, why?

7. What items do you normally buy online? And how often to you purchase these types of goods online? Please answer all that apply.

<u>OPTION</u>	<u>TIME PER WEEK (hrs/mins)</u>
Food	_____
Clothes	_____
Electrical goods	_____
CD's / DVD's	_____
Books / Magazines	_____
Second-hand goods	_____
Other – Please Specify	_____
_____	_____

8. On average, how often do you purchase online?

9. What websites do you normally purchase goods from and why?

10. Approximately how much do you spend per year online?

Less than £100	£401 to £500
£100 to £200	£500+ (If so please provide
£201 to £300	approximate figure:_____)
£301 to £400	

11. Do you have any other comments you would like to make about online retailing?

CONSUMER PROFILE

The following questions are to help me understand the profile of the participants in the study.

Your answers are **confidential** and **anonymous** and will be used for statistical purposes only, in accordance with the 1998 Data Protection Act.

12. Gender?

Male

Female

13. Which age category do you belong in?

Under 18	45 to 54
18 to 24	55 to 64
25 to 34	65+
35 to 44	

14a. What is your occupation? (Previous occupation if retired)

14b. Main wage earners occupation (if different)?

15. What is your household status?

Single

Single with children

Couple

Couple with children

Other – Please Specify

16. Please give an estimate of the annual income for your household?

£0 to £14,999

£15,000 to £24,999

£25,000 to £34,999

£35,000+

17. Where do you live? Please specify

18. Would you be interested in helping with some further research into online retailing?

If yes, please provide contact details e.g. Name, address, telephone number, email:

End of questionnaire, thank you for your time.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Study title:

Spaces of virtual consumption: the geography of Internet shopping

What is the purpose of the study?

To explore the geography of online retailing, especially its influence on people's shopping behaviours.

Why have I been chosen?

This is a baseline survey. Initially we are stopping people in the centre of Coventry to ask whether they use the internet to buy goods. If you use the Internet in this way and choose to take part you will be part of that sample.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in the project is voluntary. You do not have to take part and are free to withdraw from the project at any stage if you wish.

What will happen to me if I take part?

For the consumer survey you will be asked a series of short questions. We will be asking about 100 people in total. Your responses will be confidential and anonymous, used solely for statistical purposes.

For the second part of the project, we will be going to some people's houses to conduct a more detailed interview and to chat further about how the Internet can and is used to buy (and sell) goods. You will also be asked to keep a short diary of when you use the Internet. This again is completely voluntary and anonymous. Participants will be given a £10 gift voucher for taking part.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

All information provided is completely confidential. There are no risks associated with this study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

This survey is one of the first surveys of its kind. The results will help to aid the knowledge base of online retailing.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All answers are kept anonymous and confidential. Data collected will be used solely for research purposes in accordance with the 1998 Data Protection Act.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research will be analysed and written up as part of a thesis for a Masters degree in Cultural Geography at Coventry University.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is self-funded. The project is supervised by two lecturers at Coventry University (Dr. Damian Maye and Dr. Philip Dunham).

Who has reviewed the study?

The study has been reviewed by members of the Coventry University Geography Department and also by the Coventry University Research Degree's Committee and the Coventry University Ethics Committee.

Contact for Further Information:

Adam Smith
Geography Department
Faculty of Business, Environment and Society
Coventry University
Priory Street
Coventry
CV1 5FB
Email: asmith6@coventry.ac.uk

Or

Dr. Damian Maye
(Address as above)
Tel: 02476 887689
Email: d.maye@coventry.ac.uk

APPENDIX 2

**ONLINE SURVEY AND
DIARY ENTRY**

Study Website Index Page

Because of the online nature of the diary entry system and survey, presented here is an image of the index page of the site and a copy of the questions asked.



Diary Entry Questions

1. Date:
2. How long have you spent browsing?
3. What were you browsing for?
4. What sites were you browsing?
5. Why were you browsing these sites in particular?
6. How did these sites make you feel?
7. Did you purchase anything? If yes, how much did you spend?
8. Any other comments?

Online Survey Questions

1. What do you use the Internet for? Check all that apply
2. What do you use the Internet for? Check all that apply
3. How often do you purchase or 'window shop' online? Please pick the most accurate.
4. On average, how much do you spend online per month?
5. Please take think about the online shopping you have done in the past 12 months.
6. What is the best Internet shopping website you have used in the last 12 months?
7. Why was this site in particular the best?
8. What did/does this site make you feel when using it?
9. What made/makes you use this site rather than similar ones?
10. What is the worst Internet shopping website you have used in the last 12 months?
11. Why was this site in particular the worst?
12. What did/does this site make you feel when using it?
13. Which of these websites was your favourite? eBay or Specialist Auctions
14. Why did you make this choice?
15. Thinking about the site you picked as your favourite:
16. Overall what did you like most about it?
17. What did you like about the layout and design of the site?
18. How did the site make you feel?
19. Would you ever make a purchase from this site and why?
20. Thinking about the site you did not pick as your favourite:
21. Overall what **didn't** you like about it?
22. What **didn't** you like about the layout and design of the site?
23. How did the site make you feel?
24. Would you ever make a purchase from this site and why?
25. Which of these websites was your favourite? Amazon or Bookgiant
26. Why did you make this choice?
27. Thinking about the site you picked as your favourite:
28. Overall what did you like most about it?
29. What did you like about the layout and design of the site?
30. How did the site make you feel?
31. Would you ever make a purchase from this site and why?
32. Thinking about the site you did not pick as your favourite:
33. Overall what **didn't** you like about it?
34. What **didn't** you like about the layout and design of the site?
35. How did the site make you feel?
36. Would you ever make a purchase from this site and why?
37. Which of these websites was your favourite? Tesco or The Good Food Network
38. Thinking about the site you picked as your favourite:
39. Overall what did you like most about it?
40. What did you like about the layout and design of the site?
41. How did the site make you feel?
42. Thinking about the site you did not pick as your favourite:
43. Overall what **didn't** you like about it?
44. What **didn't** you like about the layout and design of the site?
45. How did the site make you feel?
46. Would you ever make a purchase from this site and why?
47. Do you have any further comments?

APPENDIX 3

**USER BIOGRAPHY INTERVIEW
SCHEDULE AND SUPPORTING
DOCUMENTS**

ADAM SMITH
CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY MSc
THE GEOGRAPHY OF
INTERNET SHOPPING



Coventry
University

PHASE TWO
WELCOME PACK

1 – BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH

Basically, this research looks at people's online shopping behaviours. I have proposed to do this by collecting data on Internet users via three methods. First, a questionnaire survey was administered to 100 Internet users at the beginning of 2007. This was the initial paper survey that you have kindly already completed. The next stage, aims to create Internet user biographies for a small number of specially selected participants. And the final phase draws on consumer information from first two stages to analyse the online producers (major web designers and retailers).

The following box contains some further background information relating to my project. This information was part of the research proposal document that I had to submit to Coventry University Research Council before starting the thesis.

1.1 – Box One – Thesis Proposal / Background Information

Title

Spaces of virtual consumption: the geography of Internet shopping.

Aim

To critically explore the geography of online retailing, especially its influence on consumer shopping behaviours and cultures of consumption.

Objectives

5. To explore how people first become involved with the Internet and technology for shopping, and the extent to which this is part of people's everyday lives.
6. To appreciate the different aspects of Internet shopping behaviour displayed by individuals, and to understand the mechanisms that cause individuals to buy certain products from certain electronic retailers.
7. To critically evaluate the design and content of dedicated online retailer sites, as identified by surveyed consumers.
8. To investigate the link between the online retailer and the consumer.

Relationship to published work in the area

Consumption plays a key role in modern day culture and society. In fact consumption is so fundamental to modern society that it is 'almost impossible to avoid in capitalist social formations' (1). The contemporary goal of many people's lives is the continued acquisition of commodities, and as such consumerism has become a 'way of life' (1). Accumulation of prosperity has always been a cultural feat. However, since the late nineteenth century, with the rise of economics and an economy driven society, this has been disparaged seeing culture and economics as separate entities. Current literature now deems that the 'pursuit of prosperity is a hybrid process' which 'cannot be reduced to either of these terms and, as such, requires a unitary term such as cultural economy' (3). In modern society the landscapes and geographies of consumption are numerous. One such sphere of consumption is online retailing (2).

Box One Cont... – Thesis Proposal / Background Information

Over the last decade or so the trend has rapidly grown towards home based consumption using telephone, mail order, credit cards and the internet (1). This has largely been due to various advances in technology. The behaviour of internet shoppers can be categorised into three distinct areas: browsing, one-time purchases, and repeat purchases. Related to this are consumption factors including, willingness to buy, trust/perceived risk, self-confidence, planning of purchase, and service orientation (4). One of the biggest areas of consumerism on the internet is food. Food 'has long ceased to be merely about sustenance and nutrition. It is packed with social, cultural and symbolic meaning' (5).

Consumers now have the option of purchasing food over the internet that has guarantees of quality and also an ethical status. This also guarantees some degree of traceability and thus goes some way towards calming recent food and farming worries initiated by various food scares. For example, one online enterprise gives consumers the opportunity to 'adopt a sheep' in the Northern Italian hills. This allows consumers to adopt an individual sheep and have its produce (cheese, lamb and wool) delivered directly to their door (6). This research project builds on this previous work by 'talking' to consumers that are involved in buying products via the Internet. This may include using 'alternative' retail sites (as in the case above), as well as more commercial modes of online consumption (e.g. grocery shopping via Tesco's or Sainsbury's websites, book shopping via Amazon, second-hand shopping via E-bay). After an initial baseline consumer survey, the project will attempt to further explore particular products / modes of online purchase (e.g. different ways of buying food). Using the Internet as a 'new' retail medium thus links with recent debates in human geography that attempt to explore means of 'cultural connection' and forms of producer-consumer relation.

Key references

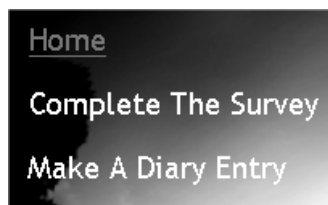
- 1) Mansvelt, J. (2005) *Geographies of Consumption* (Sage: London)
- 2) Hudson, R. (2004) *Economic Geographies* (Sage: London)
- 3) Amin, A. and Thrift, N. (2004) *The Blackwell Cultural Economy Reader* (Blackwell: London)
- 4) Smith, D.N. and Sivakumar, K. (2004). "Flow and Internet shopping behavior. A conceptual model and research propositions." *Journal of Business Research*, 57, 1199-1208.
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2 – YOUR ROLE IN PHASE TWO

2.1 – STAGE ONE: ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

In the first stage you will be asked to take a short interactive online questionnaire. The questionnaire is available by accessing the main website for this project. I would appreciate it if you could take the questionnaire **before** I visit you for the interview so that the answers you give to the online questionnaire can be used to aid the interview. To take the questionnaire please follow the following instructions:

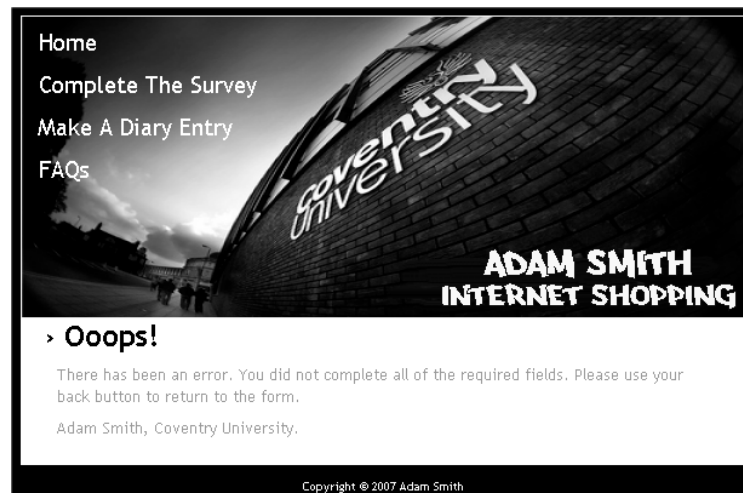
- 1) Open Internet Explorer (or whatever browser you use to access the Internet).
- 2) In the address bar at the top of Internet Explorer type in the following web address **www.coventry.at** and click go.
- 3) The project home page should load up. This provides a quick background to the project and also gives links to the interactive sections of the site. These links look like the image below.



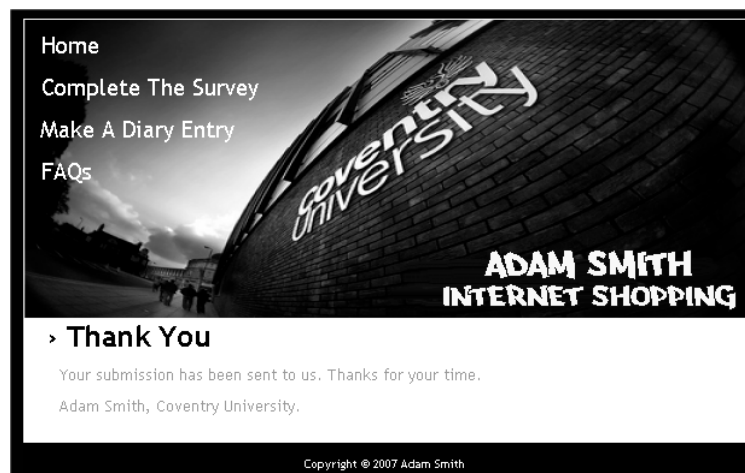
- 4) For this stage please click on the link '**Complete The Survey**' labelled (a) above.
- 5) This will take you to the survey. Now please answer all questions, keep scrolling down until you reach the bottom of the page.
- 6) Some of the questions involve clicking on links to outside third party sites. These sites are all online shopping sites and to the best of my knowledge clicking on this links should not be hazardous. These links are however followed at your own discretion. The links will open up in a new browser window, leaving your questionnaire answers safely in the original browser window. Once you have finished looking at the outside link please close the window that the outside link opened in. **DO NOT** close the questionnaire window as this will lose your answers.
- 7) Once you have answered all the questions please click the button shown in the image below.

Thank you for your time. 

- 8) If you make a mistake and you haven't completed all required questions you will be met with a screen like the one in the image below. If this happens please press the back button on your browser to return to your answers. Once you correct the mistakes please '**Click to Send**' again to resubmit.



- 9) Once the form has been submitted correctly you should see a page like the one below.



- 10) The survey is complete. Please remember you only need to take this survey once. Only your first submission will be used.

Stage one will only take about five to ten minutes. The results will provide me with some information for the in-depth interview in stage two.

Approximate Timescale: Five to ten minutes.

2.2 – STAGE TWO: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

Stage two is the longest part of the phase, but will provide me with the most useful information concerning user's online shopping behaviours. In this stage I will visit your house at a pre-arranged time and date to conduct a semi-structured interview asking about how and why you shop online. This interview and associated observations while you use the Internet will give me fantastic insight into your Internet shopping behaviours.

Approximate Timescale: One hour.

Adam Smith
Research Student
Geography Department
Coventry University
Priory Street
Coventry CV1 5FB
Tel: 07751226672



2.3 – STAGE THREE: CONSUMER DIARY

The final stage is an online participant diary. Over the course of two weeks (fourteen days) users will be asked to keep a short online diary by completing a section on the project website. This is accessed by clicking the **'Make a Diary Entry'** link on the home page. Each time you purchase something or 'window shop' online over the course of the two weeks I would like you to come to this section of the site and complete a diary entry by answering all questions.

Approximate Timescale: Up to five minutes for each entry during two weeks.

2.4 – SUMMARY OF TASKS

Stage One – Complete the online survey before stage two.

Stage Two – In-depth interview conducted at your home.

Stage Three – Diary entries for two weeks.

3 – CONTACT DETAILS

If at any point throughout the research you have a question that hasn't been fully covered in this document or on the website then please do not hesitate to contact me. The best way to get hold of me is via email, I have my email all day through the week and also check it frequently at weekends so I should reply within a couple of hours. If your question is more urgent then you can of course call me on my mobile.

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PHASE TWO INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

HOUSEHOLD BIOGRAPHY REVIEW

Names / Ages / Genders of all members of household?

INTERNET USE

What do you use the Internet for? What sites do you use for these? *Observe. Refer to survey answers.*

What is the Internet good for and why?

What is the Internet bad for and why?

In what ways is the Internet a part of your life? Could you live without it?

What is your favourite website and why? It can be any sort of site. *Observe.*

What is your least favourite website and why? It can be any sort of site. *Observe.*

INTERNET SHOPPING

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What do you buy online? What sites do you use for this? *Observe. Refer to survey answers.*

Is there anything you don't or wouldn't buy online? If so why?

Do you spend a lot of time browsing rather than buying? Approximate time?

Do you feel safe shopping online?

How do you find stores to shop online? *Search engine etc.*

What is your favourite online shopping site and why? *Observe. Refer to survey answers.*

What is your least favourite online shopping site and why? *Observe. Refer to survey answers.*

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PHASE TWO INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

NOTES